

From flight suit to business suit: An Army Blackhawk pilot's journey to pursuing an MBA

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Patrick Lageraaen:

Welcome to another episode of the UB School of Management's Manage-A-Bull Podcast. My name is Patrick Lageraaen. I'm a second-year MBA student, and I'm your host for this episode. Today in the studio we have Kaitlin Lafferty. She's a first-year MBA student and a U.S. Army veteran. In the Army, she was a Black Hawk helicopter pilot and left as a captain. After a brief stint in the industry, she came back to pursue a graduate degree to gain skills for long-term success. Today we talk to her about her Army experience, transition to civilian life, experiences at UB and what's next. Kaitlin, thanks so much for being here.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, of course. Thank you for having me.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, we're really excited to talk to you. So you're a first-year MBA student, and you were in the Army?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

That's correct.

Patrick Lageraaen:

For eight years?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Eight years on active duty.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yep.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Do you mind just telling us a little bit more about yourself?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. So like you said, I'm a first-year MBA student. I'm also a dual MBA and Master in Science of Real Estate Development dual student. I haven't started that program yet, but I was born here in Buffalo, born and raised, and then I commissioned into the Army in 2014. I served eight years on active duty, and then after completing my time in service, I decided to move back to Buffalo. I tried jumping into a civilian job right away once I transitioned out, which I'll touch on a little bit later, but it didn't really work out for me, which brings me to where I am right now. That is in a full-time MBA program-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... at UB.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. Did you mention the fact that you were in the National Guard for a year?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Oh. Yeah, so you were in the Army for eight years and then one year in the National Guard?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Correct.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Then you had this civilian job?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so it's a little confusing timeline. I started my civilian job at the same time I was transitioning out of active duty into the National Guard-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and I spent one year in the National Guard.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Got it. Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, that makes sense.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... while I was working a civilian job.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Funny you mentioned the Real Estate Development program. I'm actually taking that class right now.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Are you really? How do you like it?

Patrick Lageraaen:

It's interesting.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, just for fun.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Which class?

Patrick Lageraaen:

END 500, Real Estate Development.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Okay.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Cool. Yeah, I'm really excited. I was going to get into it later, but I actually got my real estate agent license, so trying to tie all that together into a real estate career.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Exciting. So why the military? Did you have family in the military? How'd you come to that decision?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so my brother was also a... he's also a veteran. He served in the Army for four years, and then my grandfather was also in the Army. Then when the Army broke off and the Air Corps broke off into the Air Force, he joined the Air Force.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

My grandpa was always very, very proud of his service. It was all he would ever talk about. I think just growing up with that is really what influenced my decision to want to serve my country and live a life of service in general. So that was definitely my motivating factor.

Patrick Lageraen:

So you always knew you were going to join?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, I always knew in the back of my mind I wanted to join the military. Did I have any idea what I was doing? No, not at the time.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It was so new to me. I didn't really grow up with military parents per se. I didn't live the life of a military child. I wasn't moving around all the time or anything like that-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right. So you didn't live on base or anything?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... not as a child or anything like that, so...

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay. Then just walk me through how you joined the military. So did you get an undergrad degree and then join, or did you go to an Army school?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so I can just give you a rundown of how that worked. So I was an officer in the Army. For those that are listening that maybe don't understand the military rank structure, you have enlisted personnel who go to basic training, go to their units as enlisted and can move up the ranks as non-commissioned officers. Then there's that group, and then there's officers who can receive their commissioning source in various ways. I did ROTC, Reserve Officer Training Corps in my undergrad at Canisius, so I did four years of that. Then in 2014, I commissioned as a second lieutenant aviation officer-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... active duty. After I graduated and commissioned, I then went on to Army Flight School, which I completed in just over a year-and-a-half I think it was. So I went to flight school. I became trained and licensed as a Black Hawk pilot.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Oh, sorry?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

A Black Hawk pilot.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Really?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I know. I always get that reaction.

Patrick Lageraaen:

That's so cool.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

You look at someone like me and would never think it.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

But I-

Patrick Lageraaen:

So you went to flight school and then you had to choose between fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So it was very rare that they had a fixed-wing slot available. So mostly it's helicopters, and you don't always get to choose-

Patrick Lageraaen:

The model?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, which model-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... which platform that you get to fly, it's always needs of the Army, but sometimes it works out in your favor. If you are performing really well and there's only one slot for something and everyone wants it, you have to be at the top. You get the pick.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

But I got what I wanted. I wanted to fly Black Hawks. It was a grueling year-and-a-half of my life that I never want to do over again, but-

Patrick Lageraen:

Grueling how?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It was an incredibly steep learning curve.

Patrick Lageraen:

So academically grueling.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Academically grueling, physically, mentally, flying a helicopter, I think, is one of the most mentally challenging things that you can do.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

There's so much at play. You have to stay ahead of the aircraft at all times and monitoring what the aircraft is doing at all times. It's very, I don't want to say unpredictable, but it can be at times. You have to always be one step ahead and know what the aircraft is doing and be able to control the aircraft. I think that was probably the most challenging part for me was the academic piece of it, lots of studying, lots of academics. When it comes to aviation, you don't really think of the academic side of it, but it's a lot.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Then just pushing myself, I guess, beyond what I even thought was possible for myself-

Patrick Lageraaen:

That's cool.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and being able to achieve really incredible things that many people-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Absolutely.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... can't say that they've done, but very rewarding. So after that-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Just one more question.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, sure.

Patrick Lageraaen:

So you were a helicopter pilot for all eight years?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes. I'll explain a little bit more about being a helicopter pilot, but also being an officer in the Army. When I think about my time in the service, being a helicopter pilot is really not at the forefront of my mind-

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... surprisingly, because what my job was, I was an officer, so I started out as a platoon leader in a maintenance company. I had 45 soldiers around there that I was responsible for the health, safety and welfare of these 45 people-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and I had to lead that team. It was a lot. I think I was 25 at the time-

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and I just got out of flight school. I'm 25 years old leading this team of 45. Of course, there's leadership above you that's there to support you. It's not just me, rogue on my own-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

But when I think about my time in service, that's what I think about, all those leadership roles that I had to do that was more than just flying. Flying was like a side job, which was really hard, honestly, to balance the two. But yeah, so I started out as a second lieutenant. Platoon leader was my first job. After I did a couple platoon leader jobs in maintaining my flight hours, I went to Captains Career Course, which is a professional military development school-

Patrick Lageraen:

Cool.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... where you... really prepares you for the next rank and the roles that come with that. So after I finished that, I went into an operations role, which is primary staff. I still had a small team at that point, but I was more of a individual contributor.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Then after I completed that, I did my final job, which was company commander. That is the pinnacle of a junior officer's career is doing company command where you lead a company, accomplish your mission and support... you're responsible for everything that that company does or fails to do, and you're accountable to your talent commander, your senior commanders, and influencing that entire organization to achieve the goals that you need them to achieve. That is where I decided to end my military career. It's something that I always wanted to complete before I got out because it was so rewarding. It was so challenging, but I know that the lessons and the skills that I've learned throughout that process I couldn't have learned anywhere else.

Patrick Lageraen:

Sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

While not every officer does command before they exit the military, I personally felt like it was something that would truly help me on the outside.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right, and stick with you.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, and things that you will take with you for the rest of your life.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

To have that amount of responsibility, I think, and the skills you learn from that experience is completely transferable into-

Patrick Lageraaen:

So now I see why you were so attracted to the MBA program.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. What was that like managing 45 enlisted soldiers?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

At 25, yeah, it was-

Patrick Lageraaen:

How old were they?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So enlisted, they vary. You get some soldiers that just graduated high school and go to basic training.

Patrick Lageraen:

That's like 18 years old.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, 18 years old, and they're fresh out of basic training, and they get to the unit. Then you have much more seasoned non-commissioned officers who've been in the Army a long time, much longer than I have. I'm compared to the private coming out of basic training and I get to the unit. But yeah, it's hard to describe the experience 'cause just so much.

Patrick Lageraen:

Was it fun?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, absolutely, it was fun. It was fun, but it was also very challenging. Active duty was very high up-tempo. So I think my first assignment we deployed on a rotation to Europe, so I had to get that platoon ready to go to Europe. So I had to get my team ready, pack all of our tools, our equipment, our vehicles, our tools to repair the aircraft and maintain the aircraft. You have to get all that ready and then take it all to the port and then go to Europe.

Patrick Lageraen:

Were you on a Navy ship?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No, the aircraft traveled by ship, but we flew over in a plane.

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh, okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. So we flew in a plane, we met all our stuff at the port-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Interesting.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and got our stuff. Yeah, it was a very interesting exercise almost, and I think that was the point of it was to display our ability to rapidly deploy.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So getting all the people ready, getting all your equipment ready, getting it staged, it's a very big operation, and then just being ready at all times. So constantly being in a ready state. So we were there for about nine months, and then we came back.

Patrick Lageraaen:

So you're in the military for eight years. You held this final position leading that platoon, and you decided to leave?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. So the final position was company command. So-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Company command.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... company is the next level up-

Patrick Lageraaen:

So that's multiple platoons?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... to the platoons. Yes.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So there's multiple platoons in a company. There was three in mine. It was about 120 people.

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

That was my last job was company commander of a maintenance company. I had about half-a-dozen junior officers and senior non-commissioned officers as my direct reports helping me lead the team. That's when I decided, yeah. So I think it was during my command that I truly decided that I was going to get out. I think I was on the fence about it, about doing a 20-year career-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... in the military, which a lot of people do, but a lot of people don't.

Patrick Lageraen:

So were you at a point where you had to make a decision, like you're either in or you're out?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, I think I could have made it after the fact, but the timing was right. Generally, before command it's like if you're not going to do 20, that's generally the time that you want to get out, because after that,

you're going to more schooling for the next rank, and then being thrown into way more challenging positions that if you're not signed up for that, then that is the time to get out-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... before you go down that path.

Patrick Lageraaen:

What's a more challenging position?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Like a battalion commander, just higher levels of command-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Those get more challenging?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... because They grow in size, they grow in complexity and-

Patrick Lageraaen:

So you got to really know what you're doing.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. You have to know what you're doing for all jobs, it's critical. But I think even more than that is that you're even more in the spotlight-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... because the higher you go up is the more people see you.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Absolutely. So you decided to leave. Why a graduate degree? Why not just go straight into a job?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So I actually did do that. I left active duty and then I went right into a job.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay. What was the job?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I was a senior manager at an aerospace and defense company here in Buffalo. It was an amazing job. It was an awesome job. I was so thankful for that opportunity. It was a great company, but there were a couple of moments where I realized something was like... I was missing something. I just remember sitting in my boss's office and we're going over the budget. I was responsible for doing a very large part of the budget, putting it-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... together, managing it. I was just thinking to myself, I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I don't have any idea what I'm doing with this."

Patrick Lageraaen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

"I have never done something so technical with a budget and managing money." We managed a budget in the military, but those really weren't our metrics. We measured people and resources and training, and those were our metrics to make sure that we were ready at all times, and that whatever resources that my team needed at the time, I made sure that we got those resources. It wasn't really about managing a budget-

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and the civilian side is totally different. At the end of the day, it is focused on the bottom line-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and it's like, "Can you manage your money? Can you manage a budget?" If you're not doing that, if you're not generating revenue and profit and growing as an organization financially, the company was going to fail, probably.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I don't want to say limitless, but it's like if the military needs something to succeed-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... they will probably get it. Yeah, I had that moment of realization. I felt I had this skills gap.

Patrick Lageraen:

So you needed more.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I needed more, and I feel like I needed more of a foundation of business in the civilian side.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

That's what made me realize that I want to go back to school and get my MBA.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and that felt like the right thing to do at the time in order to get that foundation of knowledge. I still feel like today, that was the right decision to do. It was a very hard decision to make. I left a really good job, a really good paying job. But I wanted to ensure that I am ensuring that I can be ready for next levels-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... in the civilian side-

Patrick Lageraen:

Long-term success.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Long-term success, and I don't feel like I was there. I didn't feel like I had the knowledge that I'm going to gain out of getting an MBA program.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right. I think that takes a lot of maturity to admit, even after the fact-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

That's true.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... talking about it-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It's tough.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... but that's very important to you [inaudible 00:19:17]

Kaitlin Lafferty:

You have to be vulnerable.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yes. Yeah. So what made you decide you'd be?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So-

Patrick Lageraaen:

You're from Buffalo.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, of course. That's really it. The location was the number one factor for me, and being able to network in the city and build a network of professionals in the city to help me find a career, find a job that is right for me, that just seemed like the best idea to get a degree from not only a good school, but from a school that's in the city that I want to work in. The city has so much to offer. It's very diverse. Honestly, I think UB is a reflection of that and how diverse the city is and how much it has to offer.

Patrick Lageraen:

Totally agree.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

This school is so big and has so much to offer, there's literally something for everyone. Whatever your passion is, whatever career you want to pursue, I can guarantee you UB probably has either a program or an organization for that. When I was looking at all the MBA programs, I was just blown away at all the... even the dual programs that they had-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... which is super cool. You could be a doctor and get an MBA at the same time. I don't know if I would want to do those two programs together-

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh, man.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... which I have a couple students in my class that are doing that. I was like, "Wow, good for you. That must be incredibly challenging to balance those two things," but-

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, UB is very cooperative between the different degree programs, which is super helpful.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Right. Yeah, so UB is very diverse, and even if big schools scare you, maybe you want a smaller scale, smaller student-to-teacher ratio. You can find that here. That's how-

Patrick Lageraen:

Especially in the School of Management.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes, it's-

Patrick Lageraaen:

In the MBA class.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. It's like my class-

Patrick Lageraaen:

We never had more than 35 people in a single class-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Right.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... and that was a big class.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. So you can have both have that small school feel on a big campus, so lots of good things here at UB.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. But your intention was to stay in Buffalo, and so-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... the connections you'd make through UB were important to you.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, very important. Networking is so important.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right. Yeah, makes sense. So how was that transition? So you left the military, had this job for a little bit, but now you're back in school. So how is all that going?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Okay, so first I just want to say that the military, in terms of transitioning out of the military, the military has come a very long way in how they help veterans transition out of the military and into the civilian world, because it is incredibly challenging to do that. You're moving on from something that was your entire adult life-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Where you have a lot of structure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

A lot of structure.

Patrick Lageraaen:

A lot of things are done for you-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... like food?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, not good food.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. There is, like you said, a lot of structure in that type of environment, that culture, it's just a totally different culture. To go from that to trying to establish yourself in the civilian world is a very daunting thing. The military has, like I said, come a long way in helping that transition. So they offer networking opportunities. They offer education. They offer opportunities to gain certifications or even do internships before you even leave-

Patrick Lageraen:

Oh, wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... active duty. So it's like they've set up this whole Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program, I think. Now anyone exiting the military has this help, and there's so much so help out there now that it's almost overwhelming and disorienting. I love that I have all this help now, but I don't know which direction I want to go in yet-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... so it's like, "I got to figure that out first." So I did that. I utilized those resources on my way out. After I finished command, my commander was nice enough to let me participate in the program where I earned my project management professional certification on my way out. I felt that the experience that I had, I felt tied really well with project management, and I like project management. I felt like it would be something that I could use on the outside, so I did that. That was awesome. Then I came up to my last day on active duty. I signed out of the unit, packed up my car and drove home-

Patrick Lageraen:

That's it.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and that was it. I just remember feeling like, "Okay, now what do I do?"

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I just spent the last eight years of my life having this incredible amount of responsibility and a culture that was very go, go, go 24/7, always on call, and now I didn't have that anymore. I was figuratively alone. There's all these resources out there, but-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... at the end of the day, I had to figure that out on my own, what I wanted to do and where I wanted to go. I'll tell you, it's been almost two years at this point since I left active duty, and I still feel like I am transitioning.

Patrick Lageraen:

Really?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Wow.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Just because I am not in a stable place. I don't have my career all figured out yet. I don't have a job. So in a sense, I feel like I'm still transitioning.

Patrick Lageraen:

I think a lot of graduate students feel that way.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, and any student, and it's not just unique to military people.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Right?

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It is a transition.

Patrick Lageraaen:

I think we're just having this conversation because of how different it is.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

What was it like in your daily life? So you wake up in the morning now and you don't have to do anything you don't want to do.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So a normal day on active duty would be like, okay, my alarm's going off at 4:30 in the morning. I have to get up. I have to go do PT, physical training, so we had to do that every day, and every day is really different. It could be like, oh, today we have to pack up all our CONEXes for a trip to the field or for

rotation or for deployment, or it's like, "Hey, get the aircraft ready. We got to go fly this mission," or, "We're going to go do a training flight here," or every day was just very different, or-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Was it laid out for you ahead of time? Did you know the night before what you're doing that day?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, yeah. There's definitely that kind of structure. The Army's very good at planning. We're really good planners. I think anyone on my MBA team would tell you that that I'm the planner on the team, but-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Do you plan your own life? You're still in the military?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I try to map it out. It's funny, 'cause I see some of the tools and techniques that some of the professors here are using to teach the students to help them, I guess, forecast the next five, 10 years of their life and where they want to be professionally.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. I know who you're talking about. Shameless plug Bob Neubert?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes. Yeah. I love that he gave that assignment 'cause I was like, "Yeah, I don't know why I haven't put this together yet, but-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Back casting.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, back casting, it's a really great tool to help you figure out where you want to be and then identify the steps to get there, so-

Patrick Lageraaen:

What time do you wake up every morning?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Today?

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Now I sleep in a little bit 'cause I feel like I've earned that right.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay. Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

But yeah, I think I get up at 7:00 now.

Patrick Lageraaen:

7:00 is sleeping in?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. Which time do you get up at?

Patrick Lageraaen:

By 8:00. 8:00 today.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, yeah. I cannot sleep in past 7:00, 7:30. I just get up, get going. I'm very, I don't want to say regimented, I'm not super regimented, but-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah. So a lot of things have stuck with you.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Oh, yeah. For sure.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

For sure.

Patrick Lageraen:

Have you found any struggles with daily life that you find a little bit frustrating just because of how different they are from being in the military, having to do all these little menial tasks before you can get to the big stuff?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So I think the biggest struggle for me is accepting that I'm not in the military anymore. I don't wear the uniform anymore. The people that I'm now surrounded with, for the most part, the majority of people, we're not in the military.

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So I need to-

Patrick Lageraen:

Adjust your expectations of them?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Well, adjust my expectations, but also adjust myself. I think I'm reinventing myself but in a way that's not giving up everything that I've accomplished and learned over the last eight years of service, because those do carry over. Even though I'm not a service member anymore and I do have to move on, I would

encourage veterans to not let go of everything that they've accomplished, and they should be really proud of what they've done-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Absolutely.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and use those skills, mostly leadership skills that they've learned in the military and use that in your new life on the outside. So I think that's the biggest challenge for me right now is just trying to adapt, reinvent myself and figure out where I want to go after graduation.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, that's a big one. How has your experience in the military influenced your approach to the MBA?

We touched on it, the planning aspects-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Right, yeah, so kind of-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Any other things?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. So I'll just say that I approached the MBA program the same way I approached anything in the military that was tough and a challenge that I had to overcome or something that I had to accomplish, and that is with discipline. I like to say all the time that you're never always going to be motivated to do something, and that's where discipline comes in. You're not always going to want to do something. You're not always going to want to wake up at the crack of dawn and go for a run or put on a 30-pound ruck, which is what I still had to go on road marches.

Even though we were in aviation, we were rucking with the rest of them. You're not always going to want to do those things. You're not always going to want to study for stats or finance or accounting, sorry to the professors, but so just having that discipline to do the things that I don't really want to do,

but I know that I need to do it and it's going to be good for me and it will ultimately help me succeed in the long run. So just applying that discipline has helped me through everything in life, to be honest.

Patrick Lageraen:

I think you touched on a really great point there, 'cause in the Army, someone's always making you do it, but now you are the one making you do it-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

... and that's why discipline is so important.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. You don't have someone breathing down your neck telling you to do something, now it's like you have to do it. You have to be disciplined enough to do it on your own.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. Yeah, really great point. How about group projects?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so-

Patrick Lageraen:

How is that thing going?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Tying into what we were talking about, adapting myself and reinventing myself and realizing that I'm now working with people that aren't in the military. So it's been really great, but there's also been challenges and conflict, but conflict isn't necessarily bad. I have a lot of experience through the military in dealing with conflict and managing the conflict to come to a resolution-

Patrick Lageraaen:

To make it constructive?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, and learn from it. I think the great thing about being a part of a team to where we recognize that, "Okay, there's conflict, there's misunderstanding," and working through that together as a team, just being able to work through that conflict as a team and come out stronger on the other side of it. I'm learning more about myself and the small team setting than I thought I would. Honestly, that's one unique thing about the program too, is that you do get to work in the teamwork setting and learn a lot about others and managing others and managing yourself.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Have you ever caught yourself in a group setting expecting too much of people as if they were still in the Army?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes. I just-

Patrick Lageraaen:

If someone doesn't do their part or get something done?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so that's an interesting question. Yeah, but I think it's more in terms... 'cause in the military, we're all united around a mission and values and sacrifice.

Patrick Lageraaen:

That may not be the case-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... in real life.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

In real life.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I remember my first job, I was talking to a colleague of mine, and he was also a veteran. I said something about the level of commitment of others on the team. He made a point that it's not the military anymore. It's not all about that anymore, which I can agree with. I also disagree with it. I think depending on which organization you work for, it can really be united around values. It just depends on if that's important to you or not. But I think that was an adjustment was to realize that, "Okay, well, not everyone is motivated by-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... the mission or values or..."

Patrick Lageraaen:

So then maybe in a group setting you need to work hard to identify common values or establish them.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, yeah, no-

Patrick Lageraen:

Then you can hold people to a similar standard more readily.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, absolutely.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So after your MBA, actually, it's a dual degree MBA or in the MS in real estate. So what are your plans? What's happening after this?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, so to be honest, I do not have an answer for that question.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay. You're staying in Buffalo?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I'm definitely staying in Buffalo. If we were to do this podcast a year from now, I'd probably have a clear answer for you.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I think ultimately, I want to do something that is of service to others still. I just spent the majority of my adult life so far serving my country, and now I want to come to Buffalo and serve the Buffalo community. I don't know exactly where that's going to take me, but as long as I am fulfilling that goal, then I am happy. Right now, it's looking like something in the real estate industry.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Like low-income housing?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes-

Patrick Lageraaen:

That's extremely service oriented.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... like low-income housing, veteran housing. I would love to tie in something to do with veterans. But yeah, low-income housing is definitely up there. I'm looking at certain companies in the Buffalo area that nonprofits, that is their mission is finding-

Patrick Lageraaen:

There is one in Buffalo, I'm forgetting the name. I'll get it to you later.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Is it Belmont?

Patrick Lageraaen:

No.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No?

Patrick Lageraaen:

No, I think it starts with a C. Anyway-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, let me know.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, I will. I love that you mentioned service. It reminds me of, we have a professor, Jim Lemoine, who does a lot of guest lectures in the Leader Corps program.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Okay.

Patrick Lageraen:

Then he also has a couple classes of his own. One of his big lectures is on servant leadership and how you can be a servant in a leadership role. That's something I really identified with, so I'm glad you said that. So we'll check back a year from now.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, hit me up. I'll let you know what I'm thinking. But I think after starting the Real Estate Development program and seeing what's out there career-wise, I'll have a much better idea and where I want to go.

Patrick Lageraen:

Then just to come back to UB a little bit, I don't think we touched on this. What resources does UB have for veterans?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

So for any veteran that's looking to come to the Buffalo area or not, I highly encourage you to come to UB because there are a lot of resources available to not only veterans, but every student here. For me personally, I had such a great experience just even from applying to the school. Admissions is wonderful here. They're very veteran friendly. If you don't know what you're doing when you're applying, they're there to help you. I remember when I was applying for the MBA program here at UB, I was actually at my annual training, which is a 14-day field exercise with the National Guard. I remember being in my uniform, sitting in the car, conducting my admissions interview with Meghan Wood, and she was just so accommodating, so wonderful, helped me... I already blew past the deadline for the admissions, and she made sure that my application was submitted, and it got accepted. She helped me with scholarships, helped me with using GI Bill benefits, which I didn't end up using because I did get a scholarship, but-

Patrick Lageraen:

So they were knowledgeable about all that?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, they were knowledgeable or at least knew where to direct me.

Patrick Lageraen:

Sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

They're not able to answer all the veteran-specific questions. But then I was directed to the Department of Veteran Services, which is another organization on this campus that is for veterans. It's also a very good organization, and they do a lot for veterans here. One thing specifically that I went to just earlier this semester was a recruiting event that was specifically for veterans that was put on by that department, and it was just so awesome because it was executives from this company. It was M&T Bank and me and a handful of other veterans in the room. I wasn't competing to get anyone's attention. It was just very like an intimate setting and I was able to network with a major company in Buffalo, and companies in Buffalo are very veteran friendly.

Patrick Lageraen:

Really?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

They appreciate what veterans have to offer because they know that they bring a lot to the table.

Patrick Lageraen:

Are companies not veteran friendly? Is anybody anti-veteran?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I wouldn't say that anyone's like anti-veteran.

Patrick Lageraen:

They're just-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

They're just-

Patrick Lageraaen:

... kind of neutral?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... outwardly supportive of veterans-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and they have resources or a network of people at that company. That is what I think veterans are looking for-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... and so they don't have to completely lose touch with who they were in the military. They can go to a company that's military friendly and have a lot of veterans, and it's like they could still feel that sense of comradery and community.

Patrick Lageraaen:

So common values.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Common values and-

Patrick Lageraaen:

Structure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. I will say I did interview for a company when I was looking for a job, and I did get the sense that they, not that they weren't veteran friendly, but that they weren't very supportive of the requirements of serving in-

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... the National Guard. They were a little off put by having to go once a month or-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... two weeks out of the year.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah, but you're not in the National Guard anymore.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

I'm not in the National Guard anymore.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No. I decided to transition out completely-

Patrick Lageraen:

Right.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... at that point.

Patrick Lageraen:

Yeah. So a consulting firm where you might be on a project for weeks on end and there's no flexibility, that would be not veteran friendly?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

No, I wouldn't say that that's non-veteran friendly.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It just depends on the company and how they approach veterans, I guess, and if they were... By law, companies have to support reservists and National Guard soldiers, but yeah, I wouldn't say that they would be anti-veteran.

Patrick Lageraen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

Gotcha.

I'd like to agree with your point about the School of Management and admissions office.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraen:

When I interviewed for the MBA, I was on a yacht in the Caribbean on very sketchy Wi-Fi, and Erin O'Brien was very patient, and she's the reason I'm here.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah. That's so awesome that you had a similar experience. I feel like they go above and beyond to help you-

Patrick Lageraaen:

For sure.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... which is awesome.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Yeah, totally. What advice would you give a veteran looking to pursue higher education or UB?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Okay. First, I would say just reiterating that Buffalo is an amazing city. It's a growing city, and UB is the same in the sense that, like I said before, there's just so much offered here and especially for veterans, there's just so much support for you here. Secondly, if you're leaving the service and you don't know necessarily what you want to do with your life, what you want to be when you grow up, going back to school is a really good option.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Okay.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Going back to school full-time is a good option if you can afford to do so. If you can afford not to have a full-time job, maybe you have a family to support, but maybe you don't, and if that's right for you and you can do it, I highly recommend that you go back to school and use that as an opportunity to really figure out who you want to be, what you want to do, because you have the luxury to do that in this setting, which is really cool.

Patrick Lageraaen:

So obviously more skills are better.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Do you feel like just that time transition is helpful instead of going straight from the military to a full-time job, you have this time to work on yourself a little bit?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yes, exactly. That's what I'm saying is you now have all this time to build skills, reinvent yourself in a way that's going to work on the outside in the civilian world-

Patrick Lageraaen:

'Cause you have the time to do it.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

You have the time to do it, not a lot of time 'cause schoolwork, but I'm just kidding. Yeah, it's an excellent opportunity to really work on yourself, develop yourself and figure out what you want to do. Leaving the military and then jumping right into a job, that is completely different than the military for the most part.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Is it just a lot of change-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It's just a lot of change-

Patrick Lageraaen:

... all at the same time?

Kaitlin Lafferty:

It's just a lot of change all at once, and it can be really stressful, especially just leaving the culture and the network that you just left and you don't really have that structure anymore. Going back to school, I think, will better prepare you for that transition into those roles or those companies.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Well, Kaitlin, thanks so much for being here.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Thank you so much-

Patrick Lageraaen:

We're really happy-

Kaitlin Lafferty:

... for having me.

Patrick Lageraaen:

... to have you here.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Thank you.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Awesome. Well, thanks for your time.

Kaitlin Lafferty:

Yeah, thanks.

Patrick Lageraaen:

Thanks for listening to the UB School of Management's Manage-A-Bull Podcast. Again, my name is Patrick Lageraaen, and I was your host for this episode. Thanks for listening.