

I am Lieutenant Commander Blake Dremann and I am currently assigned as a supply chain manager for DOD's nuclear enterprise. I've served in the Navy for 13 years and deployed 11 times, including five patrols on the USS Denver, one year in Afghanistan with the 101st Airborne, and five strategic deterrent patrols aboard the USS Maine, a ballistic missile submarine.

I've been told three times that something other than my capability to do the job was the reason that I wasn't worthy of an opportunity. First for my gender assigned at birth, second for sexual orientation prior to transition, and third for my gender identity.

In 2010, the Navy changed the policy preventing women from serving on submarines and in 2011, Congress repealed 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'. This opened the opportunity for me to be selected as one of the first women to integrate submarines and for the first time I did not have to hide my sexual orientation. Each time a mission- or capability-irrelevant barrier was removed, I rose to the occasion. I succeeded as a submariner and was ranked as the top supply officer in the submarine squadron. However, despite all of my success, there was still something amiss and had to change.

I began my transition in 2013, two weeks before my fourth patrol and before policy changed for transgender service members. The next year I was a more confident officer and a better leader. It culminated in my ship being named top boat in the squadron and 2015 I won the Navy League's Batchelder award, given to the top 5 junior officers in the Navy's Supply Corps for contributions to the operational readiness of the fleet. Recently, I served on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon and am now at a Joint logistics command. I have continually exceeded expectations and met all requirements to be fully deployable. Open service afforded me the opportunity to not only be who I am, but also an educator and an advocate on behalf of my service members.

In my personal capacity I also serve as the president of SPARTA, a non-profit that provides peer-support, educates, and advocates on behalf of over 800 service members who happen to be transgender, it is my responsibility to know and understand the policies of all 5 armed services. My team and I have coordinated with policy experts and commanders from each service when there are delays or issues to help resolve them as quickly as possible. We've worked to eliminate confusion in transgender policy, providing practical implementation solutions and emphasizing that good leadership is the key to success. It was the same with women in submarines and the repeal of DADT. Good leaders can take a team and make it work. Great leaders mold their teams to exceed expectations because it doesn't matter if you are female, LGBT. What matters is that each member is capable and focused on the mission.

Each time the military incorporated a minority group it was met with resistance, citing fears about mission accomplishment, unit cohesion, and morale. Each time, it was forecast that sexual harassment charges and privacy issues would be rampant. For me, whether it was because of my sex at birth, my sexual orientation, or my gender identity, each accusation has been found completely without merit. We busted the myths that women can't be submariners, that gay and lesbian service members are a detriment to unit cohesion, and that trans people are incapable of service. Readiness and lethality of our military cannot be maintained by closing doors to the best and brightest this country has to offer. It just so happens that some of the best and brightest happen to be transgender.