

The Committee on Small Business
“Continuing to Serve: From Military to Entrepreneur”

Support for the Boots to Business Program from Torrance Hart

My name is Torrance Harrington Hart, and I am an Air Force Veteran, former Air Force spouse, and also the Founder of Teak & Twine, the small business I founded after I separated from Active Duty. I am here to talk about my involvement in the Boots to Business program, and to lend support for this valuable program, and its role in empowering military veterans and especially for military spouses to try entrepreneurship.

Starting a business after I left the Air Force was not my first choice. I had always thought that I would go to Business school after getting out of the military, with the goal of joining a startup after graduation. However, as my time in the military wound down, I realized that going to business school would mean years of separation from my husband, who was still Active Duty. Even if I did choose to go to school, how would I get a job, let alone build a career in some of the remote bases my husband would undoubtedly get stationed? After months of agonizing over the decision, I decided to skip business school, and go straight into entrepreneurship. I attended Boots to Business a few months after launching my company Teak & Twine, after hearing great things from my Air Force friends about the program. While I was already well on my way in my entrepreneurial journey, the course validated many of my early decisions, and would have been especially valuable if I had wanted to raise money; the course does a great job of laying out the options for loans and raising capital. Even better, it put me in touch with my local VBOC, which continued to be a resource for me over the coming months and years as questions and difficulty decisions came up.

In the four years since I've left Active Duty, I've moved my business two times across the country due to the military, and my customers have never even known. To be honest, I've grown Teak & Twine beyond my wildest expectations, and have done so in the most remote and isolated duty stations imaginable. My business allowed me, even as a military spouse, to build a career that I absolutely love, and I'm so grateful that I wasn't able to pursue my “first choice!” Even better, everywhere I've been, I've hired from a group of the most brilliant, hungry, and talented people I've ever met: my fellow military spouses, without whom I wouldn't be where I am today.

For many of the military spouses I've talked to, being a military spouse means giving up on their career ambitions. Frequent moves to remote locations make it hard to establish what many of us thought of as a “real” career. I see entrepreneurship as the secret weapon for military spouses: it's a way to create something that can support your family, give you the flexibility you need during deployments, give you the freedom to do something that you love— it moves with you when needed and even allows you to give back to other military spouses. It's an incredible career open to anyone, no matter where you are! The Boots to Business program is vital in giving military spouses the resources, information and foundation they need to unleash the amazing possibilities of entrepreneurship.

Thank you so much for opportunity to speak with you today.

Torrance H. Hart
Owner, Teak & Twine
Springfield, Virginia