

Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velazquez, and distinguished members of the Committee on Small Business, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss the success and challenges veteran entrepreneurs face. My name is Liberty Weaver, and I am the Owner of Breakable Hearts LLC. Breakable Hearts is a dessert catering company that provides beautiful up-scale desserts for weddings and events. We provide our services to Southeast Georgia and Northeast Florida. We are based out of Fernandina Beach Florida and have been operating since February 2021.

I joined the Air Force in 2009 directly out of high school. I was assigned as a 4Y0X2 or Dental Laboratory Technician. No, I did not clean teeth, I made teeth. In the 6.5 years that I served I became a subject matter expert in pediatric removable orthodontic appliances. Although I was set to go far, I had to cut my time in the military short. Transitioning out of the military was scary but I was optimistic. I was pregnant, writing a patent for an invention I thought would retire me and going to school. When exiting the military, I took a class called boots to business. This class was interesting, encouraging, and informational. It sparked a little fire in me that maybe I could start my own business.

Once I was out everything I had just been taught seemed to get locked away while I proceeded to embark on this new journey of motherhood, education and living in the middle of nowhere Germany. My husband was active-duty Army, so I spent the next few years following him around while I finished my bachelor's degree. When we moved back to the states, I was excited, I had a new degree, I knew the language and I was going to get this amazing job with all the information I had learned in school. Wrong! I had no experience. My only work history up to this point was the military in a very niche career field.

Without the experience to work in my career of choice I used my experience from the military to land a job at a dental lab. I was hired as the removable appliance manager in Richmond, Va. It wasn't long after working there I started to feel stuck. I struggled with my dreams and goals and what I was qualified to do. In this day and age an bachelor's degree is equivalent to a high school diploma. With fear of wasting my life away I started a new career in marketing. I had human interaction and got to utilize things I had learned. I really liked this job, and it gave me the experience I was looking for to pursue other careers in the psychology field. Then, covid happened and everything got shut down. So, with fear and

death looming over me every day I did what any normal person would do and I moved to Florida with my daughter and husband who had just medically retired from the Army. Without the option to work I decided to go back to school. I got accepted to Pepperdine University in the Fall of 2020 and graduated with my master's in June 2022. In the meantime, I had another baby and started a business from home. Why the sudden career change? As I was nearing the end of my degree, I had discussions with my professors on the next steps to accomplishing my goals and they all said the same thing. "You NEED experience". Disheartened, I stopped fighting the system and opened a small business. I had two kids, one was only a month old, and I figured I was just doing something that would allow me to stay home. Thus, Breakable Hearts LLC was formed in February of 2021.

I opened Breakable Hearts with my mom, we had no idea what we were doing or how to do it, but we were determined to figure it out. I drew on strengths and skills I had developed while in the military such as leadership, management, and attention to detail. We soled. We have only been actively in business for 2.5 years and have already been published in 5 magazines/news articles, appeared on national television and radio twice and have been awarded:

- Couple's Choice Award 2022
- Best of Zola 2023
- Best Rising Star Bakery 2023

So why am I here? We have hit a growth stopping point. We have maxed out the capacity of our time and space for the number of orders we are receiving. What did we do? We did what most small businesses do, we reached out to our local SBA lender to learn how to move forward. She provided us with a list of tasks that we needed to complete before we could apply for a loan and told us to investigate grants. Our main setback is capital. We self-funded the business from day one until the business started paying for itself. We spent hours researching grants, angel investors, I even reached out to the wounded warrior project for any resources they might have in connection to grants for veterans, women veterans, or small business veterans. I found hundreds, but none that applied to me and my situation.

I tried to do my own research on funding a store-front, buildouts, employees. I hit a brick wall. I don't have the capital to do it myself, I don't meet the criteria for a grant, and I can't get a loan without the capital for the downpayment. When I asked if there was any veteran specific SBA loans or women veteran programs, she let me know there was not. At this point I feel like I have maxed out my resources and contacts to move forward. I remember boots to business listing tons of resources for veterans, but I can't recall them from 7 years ago.

What I am here today to do is show how a story like mine can go from a thriving small business to a hobby very quickly. Without the resources or connections to move forward we are never going to be able to take a home business to a local business. Thank you for inviting me today. I look forward to answering any of your questions.