

InVisible InCourage LIVE

Saturday, June 6, 2020

Transcription provided by Stacie Valle for Virtual VRI

**Wayne Connell:** **Welcome** everyone to another edition of Invisible Incourage LIVE. I want to talk about our guest a bit! Have you ever had a misstep wanting to call for a doover? Do you want to have a greater doover in the world? Our guest today has served in the Gulf war, a 2 time Olympian, and a TedX speaker - among many other things, Mr. John Register!

**John Register:** Don't forget Waffle connoisseur!

**Wayne Connell:** Tell us about your journey. Go back to your military experience and what led you there.

**John Register:** With the military, everyone says thanks for your service, but usually most of us are running from or to something. For me I had just graduated the university of Arkansas and had been a 4 time All-American there and the army had a world class training program there for the next Olympic games. No guarantees but I did make it. On my way to the training destination operation desert storm came up and I was diverted there. I didn't know anything about the service branches at the time, but I loved it. I wanted to be a lifer and that's how I got into that.

**Wayne Connell:** You talked about you went in for athletics. What did you do?

**John Register:** I graduated with a degree in communications. I picked a career field that I could use somewhat. I enlisted and qualified for officer candidate school. I was working in a radio and

teletype rig. A vehicle that shoots out 50,000 watts of power when you cue the mic. I began to understand how communication works from the practical side of making sure messages are heard from both sides.

**Wayne Connell:** That wouldn't be good in the military to send mixed signals.

**John Register:** Absolutely. We see that in life all the time and for people with invisible disability. A person communicates in one way and it isn't received in the way it goes out. So that's a great point. The expertise became tactical satellites. I was on the cusp of all the mapping like gps you have on your phone back with desert storm. When I came back from the war I went to Presidio and I was dismal with the hurdles, my specialty. I was sad but I was dumped from the high hurdles and qualified instead for the long hurdles and I was on my way to make it for the '96 Olympics when I had my life change with one wrong step.

**Wayne Connell:** I understand that, I work with technology, but communication is everything. People with disabilities try to communicate how they feel and others try to just say "oh yes, I'm tired too" and brush it off.

**John Register:** You make a great point. We see that now with the protests. People aren't being heard. We can take this all the way back to the Boston Tea Party. People were disgruntled with Great Britain. This is nothing new. We have to make sure when we communicate we know the different players in the game. Keep the focal point on the focal point. People with disabilities need to know that people are listening to understand how we can better work together.

**Wayne Connell:** If someone says "all you want to do is talk about how you feel" say well, its because you aren't listening. We need to start listening and understand that what you are going through is real just because I can't see it or experience it.

**John Register:** Exactly. I can come with my experience and we can listen to each other. My daughter said earlier that my wife is always saying "you are listening but you aren't hearing." With the noise we have in our life it causes interference. With that interference it is hard for the sound to get through. If nothing looks wrong with you then everything must be fine and we have to cut down to get the right feedback to us and make sure we have been listened to and heard.

**Wayne Connell:** Think about it. You are a silver medalist. I'm not. I ran track in high school but wow - never hurdles. But some people in life their hurdles are things in life. I think about my wife with her MS, Lyme disease and PTSD. It isn't about overcoming the odds but just living with them. So tell us more about your life.

**John Register:** On May 17, 1994 I was picked to be a top hurdler for the '96 hurdler team and I was on my way to officer candidate school and I had all these things going for me. I had everything figured out. And I went across a hurdler in a training session, landed awkwardly, and severed an artery behind my kneecap. 7 days later I was left with a choice. To keep my leg and use a walker, or be amputated and use a prosthesis. I knew it had to be amputated. It was pretty much useless at that time. I was lucid enough to understand that. So the amputation was done and I was going downward in a spiral. Thinking, "who am I now?" Will my wife stick around? Do I still have a job? Then I had my friends, trying to put me in a box and where do I fit in? Trying to figure out what I could or couldn't do based on what they could or couldn't do. Then I was also trying to overcome societal stigma. All these thoughts are hitting my head.

I realized that had I -- I was thinking the limb loss, if I didn't lose the leg, I wouldn't have all these issues. I was thinking in some capacity I would get it back. But we don't get that back. And we often think we do. It might be a far reaching notion in our head. In the process of rebuilding our lives we are redefining who we are. Do we go back to the fears of ourselves and the fears of others, or is there something greater on the other side? You can not get this in a book. You have to choose for yourself what it is in your life you are willing to amputate to embrace the new mindset.

I had to make the choice to amputate. It was my choice only.

**Wayne Connell:** Our organizations purpose is invisible no more. We have to stop seeing people that way and without value.

**John Register:** To the person going through it it is giving up too much power. I am on the other side now so when I chose to amputate it wasn't a rebuild, it was a rebirth. I had to relearn how to walk, run, etc. It was no longer about friends and society, but about them catching up to where I am.

**Wayne Connell:** People who have lived with pain and the battles you have talked about for years, and you spend 30 minutes with them and it is like, oh my gosh, you realize what all they have been through. We can't be the arm chair doctor and telling them what they can and can't do. I can't imagine making the decision you did. That's hard in the mind, but not everyone can come away from that kind of decision and run the iron man. Not everyone can do that. Some can. The rest of us, each day life throws us stuff and sometimes it is illness or disability. Or maybe trauma.

Talk to me about the military and the PTSD.

**John Register:** Well it is about how people show up. There is a difference between empathy and sympathy. You were describing the sympathetic response. If I went through the hospital telling people to be a Paralympic medalists would be wrong, the leap is too great. But what I am really looking for people is to be a beacon so they know life isn't over. They still have hope and value. People would come in from the war all banged up and they would be a hero for a year in the hospital being told how great they are but after recovery and they go home and it all goes back to normal, then what do they do? That's what life is really going to be like and that's where I want our programs to really help. For them to have built resilience. In the 10 letters of resilience I want that to represent 10 hurdles. Before the race even starts there is an announcer that will say "quiet for the start" and embedded in the word resilience is the word silence. And we have to start there. We have to center ourselves on this journey.

If you aren't centered on the new life, you will hear someone say "I can't wait until I get back to normal." On the other side, like when I won my silver medal in Sydney in the long jump someone asked me if it feels good and I said yes, and it represented 20 years of work. It wasn't like I was happy to lose the gold, but it represented the hard work. But from my days at Arkansas a friend asked me if I could go back with the artificial limb technology and run against Michael Johnson. Well, no, I couldn't. But the question should be, if Michael Johnson lost a limb, could he use artificial technology and run against me. We need to come to that place.

**Wayne Connell:** I love what you are saying about a new normal. It is their new normal, not our new normal.

**John Register:** I define the new normal -- when I first lost my leg and I am bawling and my nose is running and my wife comes over and

says what is going on, and she says "we will get through this together. And that baselined my existence. And my son comes over and wanted to show me his big accomplishment on the swing. He was 5. That was his new normal. We all came to that place and it was a plateau to grow and we elevated from there.

**Wayne Connell:** Excellent. You only need courage when going through something difficult. On your darkest days, I know you have them, and what is that one thing that helps you get through today. COVID-19 has flattened everyone. We don't want to forget the people that have been isolating for 20 years. What is the one thing that gets you through one day?

**John Register:** Great question. It used to be many different answers. But the one thread for all is faith. And the end of my life, I want my God to say "well done my faithful servant." I want my life to align to that purpose. So every single day I am making sure I am showing up in peoples lives to be the best me I can be. I show up so powerfully on the resolve side because I know what my destination is. That is the catalyst and motivation, which leads to action and that reinspires us to catch the vision.

**Wayne Connell:** I love that the reality is that you care. And with COVID-19 the whole world is going through this at the same time. Where can we learn more about you?

**John Register:** I am all over social media. [www.johnregister.com](http://www.johnregister.com). Linkedin. Instagram. Youtube. I am all over the place. We always are talking about how to push through the challenges and fears you have because your story on the other side will relieve someone else.

**Wayne Connell:** Hope is not a cure but a way to help others with what we are going through.

Thank you for being here today and we are thrilled to have had you.  
We hope to see you again and get you involved further.

**John Register:** Thank you Wayne.

[End of show]