

Ex-Royal Marine who was kidnapped on finding success after 'biggest mistake of life'

A former British soldier who found success selling gym equipment during the pandemic is hoping to show others it's possible to "turn your life around" after being convicted of a crime.

Ex-Royal Marine Grant Polson, from Cheltenham, left the military in 2014 after serving on the front line in Afghanistan, where he saw a number of his close friends die.

Just months later he was kidnapped while working for a maritime security company in South Africa, protecting boats from being hijacked by pirates.

He spent four hours in the back of a van in Cape Town, where he was robbed, beaten and left "expecting to die".

'The longer they didn't kill me, the more likely it was I would stay alive'

"While I was in the van I was thinking the longer they didn't kill me the more likely it was I would stay alive," he told *BusinessLive*.

"I couldn't do anything and I couldn't defend myself as I was handcuffed. They kicked me out after four hours and left me bleeding on the street. I didn't tell my employer or the police, because I was told by people locally that incidents like that were 'quite common'."

On his return to the UK, Mr Polson began suffering from PTSD

and said he fell into a “pretty dark place”.

It was around this time, he said, that he made “the most stupid mistake” of his life.

He started importing illegal medicinal products including unlicensed and counterfeit erectile dysfunction medicines from India and Turkey.

Following a police raid on his home in 2016, he avoided jail after [pleading guilty](#) to seven counts of unlawful importation and distribution. He received an eight-month sentence, suspended for 18 months and a £10,000 fine.

“The charges were severe. I was looking at a minimum of five years in prison. It was a real wake up call,” he said.

“My partner has always been very straight-talking and she had a daughter who was young, and she said I couldn’t continue my life like that and needed to sort it out.

Mr Polson said he was “very fortunate” to have a loving partner and supportive family to help him through that period of his life.

“I held my hands up and took it on the chin and was very apologetic. I sat my family all down and promised them I would use this learning curve to project me forward in a positive way.”

Mr Polson said he and his partner came up with a business idea to use his Royal Marines experience and work with young people in schools on resilience. He set up a company, but his impending trial meant he could not be the face of the business.

“It was going well and at one point and I had 17 staff. But I could never be the face of the business because I had been arrested and I was still awaiting Crown Court at that stage.

“I was trying to turn my life around and I had people running the company for me, but when Covid hit and the schools closed I had to shut it down.”

His life changed in 2020 when an old school friend reached out to him on LinkedIn and approached him about working together.

Gym equipment was in demand as people were spending more time at home so the duo launched Recharge Fitness selling to the home market – and later into gyms.



Grant Polson, right, and Ryan Anthoney are the co-founders of Recharge Fitness

(Image: Recharge Fitness)

“We started trading in April, 2020. Although Covid has negatively impacted a lot of people, it was actually the best thing that happened for our business. With everyone at home they wanted gym equipment.”

The company now employs five people at Andoversford Industrial Estate in Gloucestershire and was named Gym Retailer of the Year in 2021.

“We had such a stronghold in the home market, we haven’t really had to knock on doors. A lot of business has come to us,” said Mr Polson.

The entrepreneur said he still takes “every day as it comes” and continues to ask himself whether his family and friends would be happy and proud of what he is doing now.

He also regularly tries to reach out to others through social medial who might not have the support he has.

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“I understand I have made a mistake and it’s how I channel that negative mistake into something positive.”

His advice to others who have made errors in their life is to surround themselves with “positive people”.

“Work on yourself. Self love and self care is number one. You can’t always expect people around you to be there to pick you up if you are not showing signs of being able to help yourself.

“Nobody needs to go to the gym and start ripping muscles but getting fresh air, eating healthily and getting a good night’s sleep can do wonders.”

For those in the military who are looking to leave, he recommends keeping up a structure once they become a civilian.

“In the military we have a lot of structure. When I left I fell into the trap of civilian life... whereas actually what I should have been doing is carrying on the structure. Getting up, doing a workout, setting myself up for the day.”

Looking to the next 12 months, Mr Polson has big ambitions for Recharge Fitness, which is growing month-on-month, he said.

The company is already working with a number of England’s women rugby players and it is also going to relaunch its #NoExcuses campaign, where the business gives a package to people who can’t afford it for free.

Mr Polson added: “We are cementing the relationships we have made, and we want to start giving back to help people in need and become more established. Give us two years and we want to be the number one gym equipment company in the UK.”

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