

# INSPIRATION: ZERO TO HERO



NATIONAL APARTMENT ASSOCIATION

EDUCATION CONFERENCE & EXPOSITION  
SAN DIEGO, CA | JUNE 19-22, 2013



## Vernice Armour

*VAI Consulting and Training*  
NAA Thought Leader



Former combat pilot  
**Vernice Armour**  
will explain to attendees  
how to take their **careers**  
from “Zero to Breakthrough.”

BY LAUREN BOSTON

**B**reakthroughs aren't about the big moments. They come from committed, consistent action over time, even in the seemingly small moments of life.

Vernice “FlyGirl” Armour, who will be presenting as a Thought Leader at the 2013 NAA Education Conference & Exposition, June 19-22 in San Diego, is proof of her own motto.

After working as a beat cop, Armour became the United States Marine Corps' first African-American female pilot—and, shortly thereafter, combat pilot—in a record-breaking three years.

On completion of two tours in Iraq, Armour left the military and launched VAI Consulting and Training LLC. There, she developed her Zero to Breakthrough Success Model®.

The key to Armour's model—and the message she conveys in speaking engagements nationwide—is the “Breakthrough Mentality:” refusing to settle, even in the smallest of moments, and demanding a breakthrough in life.

“This mindset is completely about goal accomplishment,” says Armour, who has been featured on Oprah Win-

frey, CNN, Tavis Smiley and NPR. “Sometimes I joke and call it the MacGyver Mindset—give us some bubblegum and duct tape and we can save the world. In our case, it's about saving our world. With all the challenges that are happening right now, how we respond versus how we react is the key and the power of this mindset.”

Armour says applying this mindset to one's professional career can be done simply, especially with the help of higher leadership. To assist employees in achieving the Breakthrough Mentality, Armour says leaders and managers must do a better job engaging them.

“Simply put, know your people,” Armour says. “When the General used to come down to the flight line and talk to the privates, we called it Star Power. When the General actually remembered that service member's name and asked about their family and kids, it left an impression. At that point, it was obvious he actually cared.

“That's what people want from leadership; to feel valued, listened to and to know we care. That we are professional and know our stuff is great, but if you want to build a team



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that will loyally follow you into battle, show them how you care and they will take care of you! Engagement comes from the inside out and most of the time it starts at the top.”

## Achieving Your Dreams

“Zero is the first step in achieving your dreams,” Armour says.

“Zero is where you are right now,” she explains. “When I was leaving the military, I had quite a few accomplishments, but I didn’t know anything about business. My undergrad degree was in exercise science! After I made my decision to leave the military, I knew I needed to create a plan, an exit strategy. My motto is, ‘Don’t reinvent the wheel; buy your own custom rims, but don’t reinvent the wheel.’”

Armour says she sought out leaders who were in the top 3 percent of her industry and invested in their specialized knowledge that would propel her forward.

“I hit some pretty rough times in the beginning, and four months in, I didn’t know how I was going to pay my mortgage,” Armour says. “This is where the power of the Breakthrough Mentality came in. I refused to settle and was determined to find my path to success. Within 12 months of starting my company, I had broken six figures. A lot of mentoring and guidance got me off the tarmac and into flight... from Zero to Breakthrough.”

Armour is no stranger to accolades. She received an honorary Doctorate of Law from Chancellor University, became the first African-American woman on the Nashville Police Department’s motorcycle squad, was named Camp Pendleton’s 2001 Female Athlete of the Year, became a two-time titleholder in Camp Pendleton’s annual Strongest Warrior Competition and was a running back for the San Diego Sunfire women’s professional football team.

Despite her list of accomplishments, Armour says her biggest defeat was failing a tactics test in the middle of her deployment.

“I was the senior ‘new guy’ and this was a huge disappointment,” she says. “I felt like everyone was looking at me to see how women would perform in combat, how women would handle the stress, how women would get along with the guys. I felt like I had let a lot of people down, including myself.

“What I realized later is that the faster you fail, the faster you succeed. Life is a classroom and I had just had a very

tough lesson in resilience, grit and fortitude. The best part is that failure opened the door to my dream: I get to share my experiences as a former combat pilot turned business woman, author and speaker, engaging folks around the world to be a better them and live a Zero to Breakthrough life.”

## Tangible Possibilities

In addition to failing her tactics test, Armour says another pivotal moment in her life was seeing a black woman in a flight suit during a college career day.

“In that moment, it was the tangibility of possibility,” Armour explains. “I could see her, feel her, touch her, talk to her. It wasn’t reality TV—it was my reality. I never forgot that brief encounter and, years later, after seeing that woman on a hot summer day back in 1994, I became a combat pilot and fulfilled another dream.”

Armour challenges leaders to train their employees and give them the opportunity to excel and take on more responsibility. It is only through access and exposure to training, education and leadership that people can experience the tangibility of possibility, Armour says.

“The concept of “One Mission, One Goal, One Team®” is essential,” Armour says. “We can’t do it by ourselves. The sooner we learn how to engage each other in a way that promotes collaboration, creativity and innovation, we’re winning. You have permission to engage.”

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## Check out “Zero to Breakthrough”

Thursday, June 20

9 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

at the 2013 NAA Education  
Conference & Exposition in San Diego

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