

Haley McClain Hill 00:00:02 It's a versatile product that shows women, even if you are wearing a uniform or not, and around the world, to feel confident, to feel fearless, to feel like they can always shine their light no matter what anybody tells them. Even though it's so hard to be a woman in the military sometimes. Never let anyone steal your light. Every woman, I think, is a woman warrior.

Ryan Newman 00:00:24 This is Dare to Disrupt a podcast about Penn State alumni who are innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders, and the stories behind their success. I'm your host, Ryan Newman. And on the show today is Haley McClain Hill. Haley is the CEO and founder of Torch Warrior. Wear a subscription direct to consumer, military apparel and lifestyle brand that celebrates, empowers and serves current and future women warriors. Her passion for dance, travel and empowering women and teams has allowed her to travel and experience the world, including cheering in front of 107,000 fans at Penn State as well as professionally dancing in the drop top stadium for Atlanta Falcons and the 49ers Gold Rush. Haley graduated from Penn State in 2018 with a degree in math. Well, Haley, thank you so much for joining us and welcome to Dare to Disrupt. Uh, this is a first for us. You are the first entrepreneur of an apparel company that we've had on our podcast, so we're very delighted to have you join us. Hey

Haley McClain Hill 00:01:34 Ryan. Thank you so much. I did not know that. That is very cool.

Ryan Newman 00:01:38 We like to get started here at the beginning, Hailey. So if you wouldn't mind, can you take us back to where you grew up and some of the influences in your early formative years?

Haley McClain Hill 00:01:48 Yes. So I was born in Newport News, Virginia. My grandmother was actually in the Air Force for 20 years. She was stationed down there and me and my mom lived down there and when I turned about three or four, we moved up to the Jersey area. So I was there for a year. My younger sister was born and then we ended up moving to the Poconos because it was closer for my dad to commute into the city. And I grew up in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. So that's pretty much my home. I've been there since I was seven years old. And I mean the Poconos man, it's just a beautiful place. It's a beautiful place to grow up snowboarding, a lot of activities for kids. I was a huge dancer and gymnast and kind of shifted into the cheerleading space when I was in high school for more opportunities and really, you know, once I was looking into college, Penn State was kind of the top one of my top choices.

Ryan Newman 00:02:45 So you talked about being really into cheer and dance when you were in high school. Can you talk more about that some, the influences that had and how you thought about your experiences there?

Haley McClain Hill 00:02:55 Yes. So I've always loved music. My mom, everyone around me, we just jam. We are Irish. Uh, I'm actually Irish and Nigerian. That's my mix. And so I don't know, Irish people know how to party and <laugh> Nigerian people have great sense of music. So I've always just been, you know, very in tune with the Bee. And so since I was young I was in competitive dance and competitive gymnastics where, I mean, I was going to competitions every weekend so I wasn't really hanging around the house. It was constantly out there performing, um, doing all different styles, dance of dance, hip hop, jazz, ballet, and I just loved it. And so being able to kind of shift into the cheer space, which where I could be really involved in my high school, I got to learn tumbling and got to travel all around the US for competitive cheerleading. It opened my eyes to, you know, scholarships in school and just kind of that competitive nature. Cause I feel like dance is a very singular sport. And so shifting into cheerleading really kind of allowed me to really work on my teamwork skills and just to become the athlete that I am today.

Ryan Newman 00:04:03 Well I understand, um, although I wasn't there to see it firsthand, that at the Penn State Startup Week powered by P N C, you were a speaker where you led a session called Boots to Business, leading an entire room through a cheerleading dance routine. I can only imagine what that must have looked like.

Haley McClain Hill 00:04:18 <laugh> Ryan, you would've loved it. <laugh>.

Ryan Newman 00:04:21 Maybe I'll be, maybe I'll be able to catch the next one. <laugh>, can you

--

-- share with us some of the early influences in your life growing up? Others role models that really played a role in your development?

Haley McClain Hill 00:04:30 Of Course. So of course, um, my mom, my grandmother, they have, my mom actually worked for NASA for a couple years. She's a very smart, intelligent woman, but majority of my childhood, she stayed home with us, which was just an incredible thing to have. Your mom always there. She was so supportive. She was a big proponent in school, school, school, whether I was, you know, if it was the summertime, she always had me reading books. Like she'd be like, come inside, read for a little bit, do your little chapter on it. And so I've become a very avid reader because of that. Um, my grandma, she's a fearless woman, you know, served in the Air Force for 20 years and she'll, she's just that powerhouse. And I would say my stepdad too, I, you know, I grew up with him. He's a very just calm person who always led from the front and just kind of having that family dynamic was just really positive all around.

Ryan Newman 00:05:23 So you're finishing up your high school career. Sounds like you were getting plenty of exercise from all of your extracurricular activities, trying to decide where you want to go to college. What were some of the choices you were making around where to go to school and how did you ultimately decide Penn State?

Haley McClain Hill 00:05:36 Yes, so my parents basically told me, they were like, you need to get a scholarship, you need to figure something out. It's like, you've been working out getting all these, you know, and all these sports, you're doing great in school. You need to figure that out. So we started looking into the Air Force Academy Free School, very prestigious. And because of my, my grandma's background in the Air Force, she's like, this would be a great avenue for you. So I said, okay. I applied and I didn't get in. It's a very hard school to get into. And I actually got into their prep school. So you go for a year before you actually attend the real academy. And I was like, there's no way I'm doing five years at a military academy. There's no way I'm gonna do my four and get out. So I looked into R O T C programs, I applied for the scholarship. I actually really wanted to go down to the University of Florida. I went and visited down there. I was sick of the cold. I was over it. I love the sun. And once I received my scholarship, it was for any in-state school for free. So I was like, okay, I'll go visit Penn State and visited it. Had the best time ever. Met a cheerleader there actually, which kind of segues into me actually becoming a Penn State cheerleader and fell in love and then, yeah, got in. Wow.

Ryan Newman 00:06:49 So I think this is also the first time we ever had a Penn State cheerleader, not to mention entrepreneur on the podcast. So you've gotta give our listeners a, a firsthand account of what is it like to cheer and be your stadium in front of 110,000 fans. Take us through that.

Haley McClain Hill 00:07:05 Oh my gosh, Ryan, it is an experience. You, I mean, from my first day actually trying out, I just remember my coaches saying this is unlike a cheerleading experience that you'll ever have in your entire life. You can go to some big, you know, some other bigger football school or whatever, you can even go cheer in the N F L. But this stadium right here, this history, this environment, the people, the crowd, how dedicated, it's just like, it's nothing you've ever seen before. So they prepare you, they are just constantly preparing you for just people everywhere. Our practices are very intense. It's like you're not falling, you have to be on point.

You have to be a great ambassador for the, for Penn State, cuz you're at all these events and walking into Beaver Stadium the first time, it's such a special experience for Penn State cheerleader because you go on the north end zone and you warm up and it's so, it's kind of chill, chill, you know, we're warming up, it's, you know, pre-game and then we walk around to the side before pre-game starts and we go towards the student section and it's just insane.

Haley McClain Hill 00:08:08 And they're yelling at you and our coach is like, come on, come on. More energy, more energy because you have to match that energy and it's unreal. I think obviously the whiteouts are the best. I've been through a couple really cool ones and there's just nothing like it.

Ryan Newman --

-- 00:08:24 So you cheered all four years at Penn State?

Haley McClain Hill 00:08:27 I actually cheered for four years and then I did five years at Penn State, which is hilarious. I try not to do it, but my fifth year I ended up coaching.

Ryan Newman 00:08:35 And you were a captain of the cheer cheer squad, I understand.

Haley McClain Hill 00:08:38 Yes, my senior year got the opportunity to do that and actually got to go to the Rose Bowl couple big 10 basketball tournaments, all that stuff. I mean, just an incredible cheerleading experience.

Ryan Newman 00:08:50 So how, how were you able to manage the tremendous demands of being a cheerleader for a Penn State football team in addition to your classwork and your studies, not to mention doing R O T C at the time. I mean, wow. Haley, did you ever sleep for five Years?

Haley McClain Hill 00:09:06 <laugh>, um, <laugh> short,

Ryan Newman 00:09:10 I mean, what's the wake up, what's the wake up time for this RO O T C deal and how did that go with truly take, take our viewers through all this, how does that work?

Haley McClain Hill 00:09:17 Okay, I'll, I'll walk you through like a basic week of my life. Monday, Wednesday, Fridays were my lighter dayss. I got to go to whether it's like an 8:00 AM class, 8:00 AM break till 12. And then I would, you know, finish up maybe one more late class. But I had practice Monday through Thursday from six to nine. So it was just like, you know, my Mondays and my Monday, Wednesday, Friday wasn't too bad. But then Tuesdays and Thursdays I had PT from six to seven in the morning, then I'd have an 8:00 AM and then I'd have class all day and then I'd have to go back to my RO O T C classes, be in my uniform. And then my RTC classes were from four to six and then I'd go right to practice six to nine. So my Tuesday, Thursdays were brutal <laugh>, they were brutal.

Ryan Newman 00:10:05 And I imagine you weren't necessarily living super close to where RO T C trains every year. So how are you getting to these 6:00 AM practices on those early mornings in the middle of January and February?

Haley McClain Hill 00:10:15 It was brutal. It was either catching a ride with my other older classmen, I was like, just come swing by and pick me up. And that's the good thing though, like when you are in R O T C, you have a great group of people around you who are going through it with you. So we all try to lean on each other. So it's like calling friends. I did live with a couple R O T C kids too, so it was just like we knew the drill and we just had to get up and do it.

Ryan Newman 00:10:35 Wow, incredible. Well I commend you and also I wanna say I thank you for your service as well.

Haley McClain Hill 00:10:39 Thank you for your support.

Ryan Newman 00:10:40 So you're getting through your four years at Penn State and or five years and what are you thinking next? What comes next for you?

Haley McClain Hill 00:10:48 So once I, I actually came in as a chemistry major. I was really excited about potentially becoming an anesthesiologist in the military and going that kind of route. And so when I actually tried to take my first physics exam my freshman year, I got a 30% on it and I was like, oh no, this isn't gonna work. So R O T C was like, okay, you still have to do a STEM degree, you either have to choose between engineering or math now. And I was like, I hate building things, so I guess I'll just become a math major. So I ended up finishing up math, but I ended up having to do a fifth year. So that kind of my, I, it kind of stunk because I couldn't graduate, you know, in commission with my regular class that I came in with. And when you commission into the Air Force, you know, depending on what your career is, you could end up waiting like three months before you actually go to your next lo your duty location or you can go right away.

Haley McClain Hill 00:11:42 And so I actually got the privilege of going right away because I was a recruiter in Atlanta, Georgia, and it was a special duty assignment. So they were like, we need you here ASAP to start recruiting because school's about to be up that whole thing. So I actually graduated in May and was down in Atlanta like mid-May, I think Atlanta and like, like a lot of college students was just this completely new world where I was just like very open-minded. I was like, whatever opportunities come to me, I'm just gonna kind of say yes to them. And it was kind of my, like my year of yes. And --

-- with my career and being in Air Force allowing me to be not actually stationed on a base. My office was at Georgia Tech University, so I was still surrounded by kind of college kids, which was nice.

Haley McClain Hill 00:12:28 And I kind of got to make friends that way. So when I was going out to all these different recruiting events and everything, it just still felt like I was kind of in this college phase, which I think a lot of people feel like that the year or two after college. So it was a nice transition, but what I did was I didn't feel like I was done cheerleading, so I ended up trying out for the Atlanta Falcons because I was like, I can't give up dance yet. And I ended up making it. So that kind of launched a completely different, you know, career path for me as well.

Ryan Newman 00:12:59 Incredible. So not only were you a Penn State cheerleader, you're also an N F L cheerleader as well?

Haley McClain Hill 00:13:04 Yes.

Ryan Newman 00:13:05 Incredible. You're like all, all of the, I can see all the first cascading for this podcast in terms of the first type of guest to do this and do that. It's really incredible. So thank you. What was that, first of all, how did you manage, it seems like you're quite good at this, but how did you manage once again, the demands of another incredibly demanding, uh, onus on your time in conjunction with the additional work that you had to do with R O T C? How was that and what was that conversation like when you went to ROT C and told 'em about your, for lack of better term, side hustle

Haley McClain Hill 00:13:37 <laugh>? Well, it's funny because you have to go to your commander and you have to tell them any type of thing that you're doing outside of the military, they wanna know. And I went up to him and I was like, sir, um, I was a cheerleader in college, so I'm used to having both and balancing both. So I wanted to show 'em my track record. I'm like, I was able to finish school, I think I should be able to just do my job and do cheerleading because now I don't have school on top of that. And so he's like, okay. And he's like, well, you know, you know, this is a, this is a big stage and there's gonna be a lot of eyes on you. I was like, well, to be resp, you know, not to be mean or anything sir, but <laugh> Penn State was almost bigger than this.

Haley McClain Hill 00:14:20 Like, I'm not gonna lie <laugh>. And I'm like, and I'm just trying to console him and tell him, you know, I have been in this role, I know what it takes to be in the public eye and to be an ambassador for a brand and I want to be able to prove that to you. So he said, okay, I will give this opportunity, but you have to make sure you're still on point with your job. So I went to all of my events, I crushed it as a recruiter, absolutely loved that job. And the cool thing with NFL cheerleading a lot of people don't understand is every single one of those NFL cheerleaders have to have another job. So our coaches really understand that and our practices are around that. So as a recruiter, you're really recruiting through through the day. And then I'd have practice at night, Tuesdays and Thursdays, six to nine, kind of similar to Penn State cheerleading, and then games on Sundays and nobody's throwing any recruiting events usually on a Sunday. So it really worked out perfectly.

Ryan Newman 00:15:10 Really incredible. So what was it like, I mean, talk to us for a moment about being on the Beaver Stadium stage as a Penn State cheerleader versus the Atlanta Falcon stage as an N F L cheerleader.

Haley McClain Hill 00:15:21 So what was similar was the level of excellence. It's you walk out there, you know what you're doing, and there's no mess up in Penn State cheerleading, it's like there's no falling, there's no missing, you know, your cue because it's just a cascade effect. And so that level of excellence that I had in training at Penn State really helped me be prepared to be a professional as an N F L cheerleader because they expect you to come in and be perfect pretty much. And so the differences though, I would say is obviously the bonds, right? As an N F L cheerleader, we're all grown women, like we all have other things outside of our, we're working on our careers, our families, but at Penn State, it's like, this is what we live and die for. So I feel like I of course had incredible bonds with my N F L cheerleading teammates, but it was more of a professional setting. It's like we come in, we do our job with Penn --

-- State Cheerleading, it's like, I'm living with these girls, we're going through everything. We're in this different phase in our life and we're just really, really bonding and doing everything together. So it's just, you know, we're sisters.

Ryan Newman 00:16:22 Very cool. Well, I feel like we're jumping around a little bit, but having said that, you're used to juggling, so I don't, I think you can handle it at the same time. You've got this Atlanta Falcons job, you're also an R O T C recruiter. What was that like, and what were some of the skills that you developed there in that role?

Haley McClain Hill 00:16:35 Ryan, it was amazing. I, you know, again, with my cheerleading background, I'm very used to being in front of crowds. So just being able to talk with people and interact with kids and talk to 'em about what their goals were, what their passions were, if it, if the military was a right fit for them, yes or no. And just giving them that different perspective. A lot of women and kids, you know, in high school have never seen an Air Force officer. Usually it's going in the enlisted route, like right out of high school, you just enlisted to the military. But seeing an officer and also seeing a female and also seeing a minority female, especially in Atlanta, it just gives you a different perspective. And so I think I built credibility with them and I was like, if I can do it, you can do it.

Haley McClain Hill 00:17:15 And just inspiring them in a different way. Real, I really felt like I was their cheerleader. I was like the recruiter, but also like their cheerleader. I was like, you can do it. Um, I used to speak in front of stadiums of kids and, you know, auditoriums and just come in and just explain to them. And a couple times I've made them get up and dance too, because I do think just it's, it's a way to connect and to show them that people think the military is this one thing, you know, oh, you're gonna go to war, you're gonna do this. It's like, yes and no. There's so many different options and this could give you such a great opportunity to grow as a person. So I loved recruiting, it was amazing. And then

Ryan Newman 00:17:50 After recruiting ended, did your involvement with the military continue? And if so, how?

Haley McClain Hill 00:17:54 It did, so my commitment after R O T C, because they paid for my school was four years. So after my first year in Atlanta, it was only a one year assignment. They moved me to California for my last three years before I either renewed or decided to get out. And when I moved to California, it was again, completely different, right? Going from northeast down to Atlanta and then all the way over to the west coast. I was excited. I'm not gonna lie, I was excited to see like what the whole hype was about California. And the only time I've been there was for the Rose Bowl. And, um,

Ryan Newman 00:18:30 By the way, how many, how many people can say that? I know you're in a class among the very few Halle

Haley McClain Hill 00:18:38 <laugh>. Well, I'm so thankful, just amazing experiences. And when they moved me into California, I was actually northern California. So again, never really been up there. It was a, a place called Beal Air Force Base. It's like an hour north of Sacramento. So very different from what I even knew was California. I'm just thinking LA but now this is completely different. So I'm close to Tahoe and Napa Valley and all that stuff. I was in heaven, Ryan, I'm in heaven. I'm like, this is amazing. I'm falling in love with, um, with California. And then Covid hit and I was like, Ooh, I had all these plans to travel, all this stuff. And it hit and it took a, it took a toll on me. I couldn't see my family. I was all the way on the West coast. My unit wasn't doing very well.

Haley McClain Hill 00:19:23 I actually experienced two suicides, you know, it kind of twisted my whole like world around. I know it did for a lot of people and it was just a very emotional time for me. It was almost like the real world hit, right? And when Covid, I, I couldn't even cheer anymore, right? I couldn't even cheer, I couldn't, I couldn't find. And my job kind of was like, you just, you know, you can't do a lot so you just kinda have to stay behind a desk and, you know, kind of work away. And that's when I realized, I was like, I just don't think if I can't be out in, in t --

-- alking to people and inspiring people and not being able to really play up to my strength. And I just knew it was probably time for me to start shifting and thinking about what I wanted to do outside of the Air Force. I'm so thankful and humble to be able to wear the uniform, but I knew that I could do so much more and so much good outside of it. So in 2021, things started opening up a little bit better. 20, you know, beginning of 2022, I ended up trying out, I I was like, I can't do this anymore. I can't, you know, not be surrounded by great groups of women and cheering and dancing. So I ended up trying out for the 49ers cheerleading team and made that team.

Ryan Newman 00:20:34 <laugh>, oh my gosh. Unbelievable. <laugh>. Just when, just when our listeners would've thought your cheering career ended in Atlanta, you once again exceed expectations. And now we're a cheerleader for the San Francisco 49ers as well. Incredible.

Haley McClain Hill 00:20:48 Thank you Ryan. I wasn't done. I wasn't done <laugh>.

Ryan Newman 00:20:52 <laugh>. Wow, that's, that's remarkable. So you're cheering for the San Francisco 49ers. You mentioned having, um, people that you were responsible for. How many people in total were you responsible for when you were in San Francisco?

Haley McClain Hill 00:21:06 I was in charge of 300 airmen.

Ryan Newman 00:21:09 Incredible. And what was that like to have that level of responsibility just in general for that broader group of individuals and what did that teach you about leadership?

Haley McClain Hill 00:21:18 It taught me a lot about leading by example and being able to connect with people on an emotional level. It's not all about what they're doing in their career, it's about who these people are at their core. And that's really how I gained that respect and was able to be there for my airmen when we were going through these losses. It was just like, you know, we're in the air force and we are very mission, mission-oriented people, but at the end of the day it's like Covid is hitting like, are you okay? Like, so then it just kind of opened my eyes to really having to step up, having to step up. I'm 28 now, I was about 26 then. And a lot of people don't get that responsibility to be in charge of, you know, oh, I'm having a baby, or I'm, I'm going through a divorce or you know, we just went through some suicides, like, it's just like a lot of heavy stuff to go through at 26.

Haley McClain Hill 00:22:07 And so I just learned how to, number one, take care of people, get to know them, see how they're doing, look at them eye to eye. And then also to be able to learn how to fill my own cup so that when I walk into the office I'm my best self as well. So working out, making sure I'm going to, you know, practice and, and doing these things that make me happy. Because when you're miserable as a leader, everyone knows it and everyone hates being around you. So when you fill your cup and you really take the time to get to know yourself and to pour love into yourself, you can pour that into others.

Ryan Newman 00:22:40 Incredible. Not only incredible poetic, I would say. So you're in the military, you're based in San Francisco. What was the total amount of years of tour of your tour of duty and when did it come to an end?

Haley McClain Hill 00:22:52 Yes, so I served for four years. It ended in December of 2022. I did a transitioning out program called Skill Bridge where you can basically shadow a civilian company to see what that looks like. Since you've been in this military world, they give you six months to kind of see if you even like the civilian world. So I ended up actually shadowing, um, Sports Illustrated and trying to develop their cheerleading department because everyone, you know, knows Sports Illustrated, but they didn't really have a cheerleading like competition or environment. And so they tasked me with trying to beef up the scouting around cheerleading because the all star cheer world and me being in the NFL cheer world and all that stuff, there's a disconnect when it comes to scouting and there's a lot of talent out there that gets kind of overlooked. So I was trying to build that, it was really, really exciting and really cool. But during that time I actually came up with my business idea and I was like, ah, I think that I wanna shift <laugh>.

AD 00:23:58 The National Science Foundation's Innovation core program, also known as icor, use --

-- s experiential education to help researchers gain valuable insight into entrepreneurship, starting a business or industry requirements and challenges. Penn State is a proud partner member of the Icor Mid-Atlantic hub, working collaboratively with the network of universities to build and sustain a diverse and inclusive innovation ecosystem across Pennsylvania. To learn more about the program and how you can get involved, please visit invent.psu.edu.

Ryan Newman 00:24:39 So at a time where many individuals would be in a situation like yours, perhaps tepid or nervous about the next step, you actually got an innovative creative strike of idea that allowed you to then think of your business idea. Why don't you share with us what that is and how that came about?

Haley McClain Hill 00:24:55 Yes. Okay. So it's funny a lot of people don't know, but I actually have two businesses and I started with, my first one was a women's retreat business. So during Covid I had this, I just kind of, again, like I said, I was in this kind of darker spot and I couldn't travel, I couldn't see friends, I couldn't spend time. And after the suicides and everything I was just like, I need to start building a, a community and I need to start bringing other women together so they can build their own, they can have more confidence and they can feel more resilient and they can know that they're supported. And so I was like, dang it, I'm gonna start a retreat business and we're gonna go and and go to Napa and we're gonna spend quality time together. And so that was my first idea and my first business cuz I thought that just was a great fit for me.

Haley McClain Hill 00:25:42 And so a couple months down the road when I was about to really get out of the military in June, I was celebrating one of my friends who was promoting to captain and I might have had a couple drinks the night before. And, um, military people get it, you gotta celebrate those promotions. And the next day I woke up late for work and I was like scrambling, trying to like get dressed quickly and I had a body suit on from the night before and I was like, dang, like I wish I could wear this in uniform if it was the right color and the right cut. Like no one would know the difference if I was wearing a bodysuit or a T-shirt. And so I was like, ding, ding, ding, I think I have an idea <laugh> and I'm gonna make this happen. So yeah.

Ryan Newman 00:26:25 Wow. And so and so, um, why don't you form expl render explicit, what is actually your business and and and what is the market that it's serving?

Haley McClain Hill 00:26:34 Yes, so my business is Torch Warrior wear and we create basically our body suits for military women. Incredible.

Ryan Newman 00:26:42 And so you have this business that's basically the creation of, uh, women's wear for military. Now for those that are not in military, take us through, is it something that can actually be used while serving? And are there any limitations to when you can and can't wear this type of athletic wear?

Haley McClain Hill 00:27:01 Yes. So our base layer body suits right now, they are basic com, they're basic material. So it's a ran spandex, it's very comfortable and breathable. But a lot of careers in the military require you to have an FR base layer because if you're a pilot, you know, if anything happens, you don't want your base layers to melt to your skin if anything happens with fire. So they have these FR materials where we are developing, we're in product development right now to create those FR materials for the other career fields that require that to be able to wear that in uniform. But right now our body suits are able to basically any other career field, if you're admin or if you are security forces, anything, any other career will, you can wear our bodysuits.

Ryan Newman 00:27:42 And then do you have different styles and designs? Some maybe which are more formal, some of which are more informal depending on whether someone is working in an office environment versus maybe outside training where you'd, you'd want less clothing to be able to to um, exercise, et cetera.

Haley McClain Hill 00:27:58 That is definitely up and coming. Look at you. You should be a designer, Ryan. Okay, you got, you got the ideas. Yes, that's up and coming. And I think right now we really wanted to start off with our hero product, right? We have our short sleeve and we have our long sleeve. So a lot of women in Alaska are in these colder p --

-- laces. We're like, we need a long sleeve. So I was like, okay, we'll make the long sleeve and the short sleeve is in for more of the warmer climates. But we are noticing a lot of different women in different stages of their career, such as nursing, they're pregnant, they are, you know, in colder environments or more warmer environments. So we're developing our product line to really be able to support every stage of your military career. Whether you're PCSing is somewhere cold or you're PCSing is somewhere warm or you're about to have a baby. Like there's a lot that goes on when you're serving and there's not a lot of products specifically for women.

Ryan Newman 00:28:48 Incredible. And so how do people actually purchase your product and how are you, what's your marketing strategy and your go-to-market?

Haley McClain Hill 00:28:56 Yep. So right now we're on our e-commerce site, strictly e-commerce, www.torchwarriorwear.com, you can find us on there. We also are doing custom bulk orders to individual bases. So we just had our first big bulk order from Luke Air Force Base, it's down in Arizona and they purchased about a hundred body suits for all of the women in their unit. So instead of, wow. So that's exciting. It's a different model where, you know, now I just have to go to different bases and explain myself and share it to them who, what my product is. And instead of individual women having to go to my website, they can actually get it purchased from their leadership, which is I think a better option for them. So that's kind of what we're pushing for right now.

Ryan Newman 00:29:37 And how did you come up with the name torch?

Haley McClain Hill 00:29:39 Don't make me get sentimental, Ryan. Um, <laugh>. So again, um, I've always been surrounded by very strong women. My mom working for nasa, my grandma in the Air Force, my other grandma, very hardworking woman. And during the covid time I would call my family cuz I couldn't see them that often. And my grandma would always say, Hailey, like, don't let anyone or any situation dim your light. Like, don't let anyone take that away from you. And I think because, you know, I was in a, in California my job didn't really allow me to play up to my strength. It just felt like I was just diminishing my, just my positivity, my light cuz I just couldn't be that recruiter. I couldn't be that outspoken person that I am. And my grandma's like, don't let them take your light away. And that always stuck with me. And I just thought of light and keeping your inner fire and then it kind of formed into like passing the torch onto the future generations, women to feel confident, to feel fearless, to feel like they can always shine their light no matter what job or what any, you know, what anybody tells them.

Haley McClain Hill 00:30:44 Even though it's so hard to be a woman in the military sometimes, never let anyone steal your light. So it's just giving you that inner fire torch.

Ryan Newman 00:30:50 Incredible. Well I can, I can tell you right now, listening to you and as our listeners will as well, that, uh, your light is shining bright, my friend

Haley McClain Hill 00:30:58 <laugh>. Thank you Ryan <laugh>. Thank you.

Ryan Newman 00:31:01 So as you think about your product, obviously I assume your primary customer or military based personnel, but that doesn't mean that you have to be in the military to wear your product. Can you talk about sort of the expansion of your total addressable market to just not just military personnel and, and how you're thinking about building the pipeline of those wearing your, uh, your active torch wear?

Haley McClain Hill 00:31:21 Yes. So of course my bread and butters military and we are spanning on, the cool thing is it's all branches and all phases of your military career. So from R O T C cadets all the way to generals. Like there's just a wide, people don't think of how many people actually encompasses the military. But then of course our sisters in arms, law enforcement, security, firefighters, kind of getting into these career fields that require women to wear uniform every day. I think that's really, you know, the next step. But then also after that, our body suits are very versatile. They're cute that we have black, we have white, we even have blue, we all these different colors that you can wear in uniform, but also if you got a date that night, just throw in some jeans and you can keep it moving. It's a versatile product that you can --

-- be. And it shows women, even if you are wearing uniform or not, and around the world, you can be a woman warrior. Every woman, I believe has a warrior spirit and we tried to embody that in our product. So every woman I think is a woman warrior.

Ryan Newman 00:32:19 Well, you've demonstrated phenomenal grit in terms of not just your experience building this business, but also enduring through a very difficult time in Covid and leading a squadron. And also your early experiences. One last question on the business, what is the, what are some of the challenges or how are you handling manufacturing of your product? Because obviously you could have the idea and you could have even customers who want your product, but in the manufacturing of a clothing item mean now there's a lot of, um, intense design work and, and manufacturing that actually takes that idea into somebody's hands in terms of product delivery and creation.

Haley McClain Hill 00:32:55 Yes. So really the steps are number one, no, having your vision, I wanted to have a product that felt like a uniform in, but also it didn't feel like a uniform item. It was just this blend of both. So when I put the idea out there on TikTok actually, and I got a huge response from women all over the world, from women in the German army and the French Army and the Dutch army, all these armies all over the world, I was like, okay, like women, they, they really want this, but they also want a product that feels unique to them. So I started looking around for other products that I thought were, would be applicable. And so I just kind of, in the fashion space, I was like, okay, this could work, this couldn't work. I kind of crafted my vision.

Once I had the vision, I started to find other people in the fashion space that weren't particularly in the military space, but they were able to create clothing.

Haley McClain Hill 00:33:48 So I went to a custom leather shop in San Francisco. I was walking down the street and ended up walking in and they're like, oh yeah, we create, you know, custom leather jackets. And I was like, okay, like where do you do that? And I just started asking those questions and they're like, well, we have a manufacturer done in la. I'm like, could you gimme their information? I'm like, they might not be able to make a body soup, but maybe they know somebody in that space. So it's just kind of these little breadcrumbs that led me there. I found the manufacturer in la, went down there, had my vision, told them they brought it to life, I showed them what it needed to look like and then we just kind of ran for it from there.

Ryan Newman 00:34:22 Really incredible story. Well, I wish you all the best in the continued growth of your business and I want to thank you Haley, for taking the time to share your entrepreneurial journey with me. I'd now like to hand things over to our current Penn State student, Amber Sanchez. Amber is a second year student at Penn State, her clothing brand, whatever apparel strives to inspire the youth to do whatever they dream of.

Amber Sanchez 00:34:45 Hi, nice to meet you. Thank you for the introduction. Ryan Haley, I relate to you in so many levels, not just as a business owner but as a cheerleader. And I can't wait to ask you these questions. I'm so excited. Hi. I love it. <laugh>. <laugh>. My first question for you is, did you find it difficult to set your brand apart in such a popular industry? And if so, how do you recommend finding your niche?

Haley McClain Hill 00:35:05 Great question. Amber also love the name of your brand.

It's so inspiring. The best advice I can say is nobody is you and you have to play up on every aspect of your life and your experiences and what you can do to set yourself apart as an expert in a field. I think a lot of people, when they start with a brand, they want to just enter into a space that they've never had experience with.

Haley McClain Hill 00:35:37 And for me, I knew what my ideal customer wanted because I was my ideal customer. So being able to live in those shoes, I could set myself up as the expert in my niche and I focused on women. I didn't step into this space and say, I wanna make military uniforms for everybody because I don't, I don't know what men want in their uniforms, but I do know what women want. So I niche down. I showed them that I knew what they wanted and how they can get there and how I can provide the service for them and just talk to them like women. And we had fun. We bring in the culture o --

-- f the military to show them that we're one of them.

Amber Sanchez 00:36:24 That's awesome. And you know, being your, you mentioned being your ideal customer is like you, uh, how were you able to use that and also use social media to grow your business? And how were you able to keep up with the consistently shifting social media landscape as a business owner?

Haley McClain Hill 00:36:30 Great question. The Quick and dirty is Connect, connect, connect and be genuine. I DM women still. I'm the CEO of my company and I'm DMing almost every woman that follows me. I'm letting them know that they feel it's personal, it's a personal experience. Hi, and I'm, I'm addressing them by their first name. Hi Amber. Like welcome to the Torch team. We're so excited to have you. I think a lot of people disconnect social media and it's like, okay, if they're following me, they like me or they'll, they'll stay connected. But what I really try to do is almost radiate my light and my heart into almost everybody that steps into the door of Torch. This isn't very scalable right now. So when we get bigger, who knows, I might not be able to text everybody, but as of right now, as you're growing, I think it's very important to have a lot of touchpoints with your customers and really get to know them without just saying, oh, they're a follower and we'll just keep it moving.

Amber Sanchez 00:37:24 That's awesome. And you know, personal connection is a great thing with business. Touching on that, how does it feel to be able to motivate a bunch of other female entrepreneurs?

Haley McClain Hill 00:37:31 You know, I think at the end of the day, I just want to continue leading by example. And I want to, because I do truly do believe when you're happy with your own life and when you're passionate about what you do, instead of looking at it, at it as like I'm motivating other people, I'm just like showing them without having to say anything. So really leading by example and genuinely being in love with what you're doing automatically charges and makes other people feel great. And then it doesn't get in your head of like, oh, like look at me and motivate everybody. It, it's not even about that. It's more about like, I'm so happy and excited that these other women feel like they can go after their passions because they can see me going after my passions.

Amber Sanchez 00:38:24 That's great. Well, those are the all the questions I have for you. Thank you for getting to talk to me. Thank you for coming on.

Haley McClain Hill 00:38:27 Thank you, Amber. Good luck. If you need anything, let me know.

Amber Sanchez 00:38:28 Oh, thank you.

Haley McClain Hill 00:38:29 You're welcome. Good luck.

Ryan Newman 00:38:31 This episode was produced and edited by Katie DeFiore. That was Haley McClain Hill CEO and founder of Torch Warrior Wear. If you haven't already, be sure to subscribe to Dare Disrupt wherever you listen to podcasts and look out for next month's episode. Thanks for listening.

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