

November 8, 2019 / Sal Paolantonio

“What Kind Of Mentor Could I Be To A Lieutenant Colonel In The United States Marine Corps?”

ESPN national correspondent and Navy veteran Sal Paolantonio answered his own question after Carlos Vallejo job-shadowed him during Philadelphia Eagles practice last spring

EDITOR’S NOTE: ESPN today announced a new multi-year extension with national correspondent Sal Paolantonio. A longtime, admired source for information about the NFL and other sports, Paolantonio is also known for his ongoing support of veterans and active military. He served in the United States Navy (1978-83) and retired as a full lieutenant in 1983. Last night, he was featured with ESPN President Jimmy Pitaro in a segment saluting ESPN employee veterans during an ESPN2 Veterans Week special. Additionally, he is one of more than 60 ESPN employees in the American Corporate Partners (ACP) program, which connects post-9/11 vets to business professionals for mentoring, career counseling and networking. Earlier this year, Paolantonio was partnered with Marine Corps Lt. Col. Carlos Vallejo, a war veteran with multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. Vallejo shadowed Paolantonio for his ESPN assignment covering Philadelphia Eagles spring practices in May. Watch highlights of the experience in the video above; Paolantonio shares his thoughts in the essay below.

I remember very distinctly the first time I talked on the phone with Carlos Vallejo.

I was apprehensive – and a bit nervous. What kind of mentor could I be to a lieutenant colonel in the United States Marine Corps? I had never achieved a rank above lieutenant in the U.S. Navy.

He had served in combat. I never did.

But, after just a few minutes, I quickly understood why I was chosen as a mentor in American Corporate Partnerships. Unlike me, Lt. Col. Vallejo had spent his entire adult life in the military and needed help navigating his way into civilian life.

We had several long phone conversations and then met in South Philadelphia. He watched Eagles practice with me and we had lunch at my favorite Italian restaurant.

I asked him, “What’s the one thing you’d like to take with you from the military to your civilian life?”

“I never really thought about that,” he said. “I guess the answer would have to be relationships. Building a cohesive unit, teamwork in any walk of life is done through relationships with people.”

He had a couple of job offers.

“Don’t worry about that too much,” I said.

“A guy like you will always be in demand. You can always change jobs. But after years of family separation, you owe your wife and kids this one – got to have Shalom in the home,” I said.

That stuck with him.

Every time we talk on the phone now, he says to me, “Shalom [peace] in the home, Salpal.”

When I hear that, I know I did my job.

Shelby L. Lacy and Josh Krulewitz produced the video.

Sunday, Nov. 10 in MetLife Stadium, Sal Paolantonio makes his debut as an in-booth NFL radio game analyst. He will work ESPN Radio’s 1 p.m. ET broadcast of New York Giants at New York Jets, along with play-by-play voice Marc Kestecher and on-field commentator Ben Hartsock.