

“ I envisioned a steady path through life seeking success and happiness. The Vietnam War nearly derailed me from those goals. My faith, family, friendships, opportunities, and determination helped me to overcome obstacles and realize a satisfying life. This is my story of achievement by never giving up. ”

—DAVID SZUMOWSKI, VETERAN AND RETIRED SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE



CHALLENGE

In 1969, David joined the United States Army and was deployed to Vietnam to lead a tank platoon. His life took a sharp turn when his platoon was attacked. He was seriously injured and suddenly had to confront life without sight at age 23. During his recovery and rehabilitation, David experienced emotional and mental distress as he struggled to accept his blindness. As he tried to forge a new career path, he experienced discrimination from law school admissions officers and potential employers who doubted his ability as a blind person to succeed and denied him the opportunity to prove them wrong.

SOLUTION

David’s military training taught him to adapt and overcome, so with help from a VA Blind Rehabilitation Hospital and his first guide dog, he acquired mobility and life skills. He decided to pursue a law degree and graduated from University of Denver Law School and passed the bar exam. A key element of his road to independence was his mastery of assistive technology for reading and communication, from National Library Service talking book players and Victor Reader Stream to the JAWS screen reader with human-like voices. An avid reader, David has been a Bookshare member for ten years where he finds a huge selection of audiobooks. “A person with a disability must be technically proficient and understand the tools that are out there,” says David. “Machines are available to assist those of us with special needs, and we need to learn how to use them. If you don’t, you are creating obstacles for yourself.”

IMPACT

David’s initiative, hard work, proficiency with assistive technology, and support from his wife and colleagues helped him achieve a successful career as a prosecutor in the San Diego District Attorney’s office for twelve years followed by eighteen years as a Superior Court judge. As a trial attorney, he had help preparing for his cases, but in court, it was all up to him. As a result of his thorough preparation, he knew the questions to ask witnesses, he listened carefully to their testimony, and he presented compelling arguments to the court. His determination to overcome personal setbacks and achieve his goals exemplifies courage and tenacity. Now retired, he recently published his memoir, *Reach for More: A Journey from Loss to Love AND Fulfillment*, and is enjoying time with his wife, family, sixth guide dog, Speedwell, and his golfing buddies.

Benetech is a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good. Our work transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. We’re constantly pursuing the next big social impact.