

Leading the Way to Encourage Law Enforcement Personnel's Resiliency

The Honorable Joyce E. Dudley, Chief Patrick Clouse

We, as Public Safety leaders, have a duty to keep the Public Safe.

We believe the most effective and efficient way to do this is to keep our personnel resilient. By resilient we mean keeping our personnel functioning at both their physical and *mental peak*.

We know we have not done enough to encourage this in the past, and that we are only doing slightly better now.

Given where we are, today we share Santa Maria Police Chief Phil Hansen's opinion that we should be spending as much of our resources on maintaining our personnel's resiliency, as we do on maintaining our SWAT team's capabilities.

In not doing enough to encourage our personnel's resiliency, we increase our difficulties with recruitment/retention, and decrease our offices' morale and our public's trust

So what are we still doing to perpetuate this and what can we do to improve it?

We do not overtly discuss that we work in a trauma-based profession. Nor do we readily acknowledge that the further away we get from *the line level* the less immediate trauma we experience. Yet, in reality we all know those with the least amount of experience, are experiencing, on a daily basis, the most amount of immediate trauma.

We do not do enough to properly psychology prepare our new employees for what they can expect to experience.

We also do not do enough to encourage our managers to look for signs of negative stress in their subordinates. Nor do we teach them how to approach their subordinates or colleagues when they do notice those employees are negatively responding to the trauma they are experiencing. Additionally, we have not built in to our organizations enough alternatives I.E. peer support, *vatted* individual counseling, and retreats.

Many of our organizations have not done enough of this because we still do not want to accept, and therefore normalize both the experience of psychological pain in our work and that the appropriate response to experiencing this pain is seeking help.

Keeping our work force healthy should be one of our priorities, as should responding appropriately when a member of our work force becomes psychologically unhealthy. Presently, we tend to remove them. This adversely effects them (separating them from their "tribe") and sends a troubling message to our colleagues, some of whom are privately congratulating themselves for hiding their own perceived weakness.

It's not that we don't care, in fact, most of us care very deeply, but because we feel somewhat helpless, we do not do enough.

Furthermore, many law enforcement leaders are struggling with their own resiliency issues; making addressing them publicly, privately painful.

We all know being a law enforcement employee today is NOT what it was like in the past. We believe the greatest changes are cell phones, social media and an attitude of "post first, get the facts later media culture". We believe all of this adversely affects the danger, reputation, and ability to recruit/retain our employees.

Further, we as public safety leaders don't do enough to protect our people from the harsh glare of negative media attention by publicly supporting their appropriate and positive actions.

The following is what we can do and what is being done well by some of your colleagues, likely even some of you:

We must educate ourselves and continue to educate our personnel on resiliency, from recruitment past retirement. From day one of their careers our employees, and their loved ones, need to know that they are working in a trauma based profession; one in which they will likely experience being unjustly accused.

All law enforcement personnel should learn about warning signs in their colleagues and how to best approach, address and support those colleagues.

In addition, they must learn about warning signs in themselves and embrace the fact that seeking help is the best alternative.

As leaders we must normalize seeking help or as FDNY Captain Frank Leto stated, "It is a sign of wisdom not weakness to ask for help."

As leaders we are often asked what can we do now to pro-actively ensure that our colleagues take care of themselves? Our immediate response is that we should encourage them to embrace healthy nutrition, exercise and sleep habits.

Sleep disruption and fatigue management are foundational to supporting first responder resilience.

Sleep disorders are very common in police officers. In a 2011 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, it was estimated that 40% of officers suffer from at least one sleep disorder. Other studies have shown that the presence of sleep disorders increases the risk of a variety of other medical and mental health problems, including a two-fold increased risk of cardiovascular disease and a threefold increase in the risk of depression and anxiety.

Beyond the long-term effects of inadequate rest, any amount of sleep deprivation and inadequate rest, both intentional and unintentional, can degrade an officer's alertness, memory, reaction time, and decision making both at work and at home. This leads to preventable mistakes, which could impair public safety, officer safety, or relationships.

Sleep performance can be enhanced through circadian entrainment, light restriction, relaxation techniques, and environmental modification.

Officer fatigue can be driven by physical, psychological, or situational/conditional factors. Fatigue management strategies are an additional necessary component when departmental needs prevent the officer from having access to adequate rest for short periods. The techniques can be as simple as appropriately timing of bright light, and the tactical timing of caffeine intake, and brief naps. The timing of these interventions is critical however, because if used inappropriately, they can make matters worse.

By instituting some, or all, of these practices we as leaders can rest assured that we will not just save money, careers and lives but also increase the public's confidence in us by increasing their safety.

Some of these changes will be more rigorous to implement than others, but we must be courageous in our endeavor to support our law enforcement personnel's resiliency because courageousness is what we and our communities expect of us all.