

Practical Tools for Co-Creating a Culture of Wellness

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The “Why” for Public Safety Wellness

- ◆ Why is wellness important?
 - ◆ We didn't focus on it “back in the day...”
- ◆ Wellness affects our employees, their families, and their work product
- ◆ Current environment in policing – new level of constant stress (video, use of force) ...
- ◆ We've become more educated and aware of how to better manage stress and trauma in policing
- ◆ Optimal health = optimal productivity and levels of service

Fundamental Principles

Imperative for First Responders to be whole and healthy to best serve our communities

Leaders must understand the importance of comprehensive wellness and model the desired behavior

Constant reinforcement and utilization of wellness initiatives to engrain into our cultures – not just a program(s)

We must be both leaders by example and facilitators

Remove stigma by open encouragement and assurance of no negative consequences

Types of Stress

Positive Stress - “Good stress”

- Response that we feel when we get excited
- Times we respond well to a challenge from a stressor

Tolerable Stress - Exposure to a threat or adversity

- Family member's death, serious illness or injury, natural disaster, or an act of terrorism
- Having supportive relationships that enhance ability to cope and have a sense of control

Toxic stress – most dangerous type of stress

- Relates to exposure to non-normative experiences that pose a threat and cause adversity
- Can have damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan
- Occurs continually or is triggered by multiple sources
- Can have a cumulative toll on an individual's physical and mental health

Stress vs. Trauma

Stress - our body's response to pressure and can be caused by various situations or life events

Trauma - nearly always harmful and can result from events such as accidents, violence, or abuse

- Stress is our body's response to pressure
- Many different situations or life events can cause stress, such as work environment, finances, divorce
- Stress is not always harmful, while trauma is nearly always harmful and can have lasting impact

Trauma in Policing

- ◇ Police officers report much higher rates of depression, burnout, post-traumatic stress and anxiety than the general population
- ◇ Almost 25% of police officers have experienced suicidal ideation at least once. [1]
 - ◇ Key reason – Trauma
- ◇ Trauma
 - ◇ An event or circumstance that results in physical, emotional and/or life-threatening harm
 - ◇ Can have lasting adverse effects on the individual's mental, physical and emotional health and social and/or spiritual well-being
 - ◇ Prevalent within the law enforcement community, especially for those injured on the job

Trauma in Policing

Four types of trauma for police officers:

- ◆ Acute trauma
 - ◆ Major traumatic experience such as a shooting
 - ◆ Cuts through the survivor's mental "armor," overloading their system and leaving them feeling unprotected and dealing with more than they can handle
- ◆ Layered trauma
 - ◆ Smaller, cumulative experiences that change an officer slowly
 - ◆ Mental armor falls off over time – first an arm plate, then a leg piece – and after a few years there is no more armor left and seemingly no resources available to help the officer cope
 - ◆ Officer is essentially stripped of their ability to apply healthy coping skills in this type of scenario

Trauma in Policing – cont'd.

- ◆ Vicarious trauma
 - ◆ Experiencing someone else's trauma after hearing or relating to their stories of traumatic experiences
- ◆ Unresolved trauma
 - ◆ Complex trauma that has built up over time and has not been dealt with
 - ◆ Example - officer who grew up in an abusive household and is then confronted with a call regarding abused children
 - ◆ Effect of that experience may force unresolved trauma to the surface
- ◆ Re-experiencing and avoidance symptoms of trauma can make completing the most mundane tasks seemingly impossible
- ◆ In many cases, those battling post-traumatic stress turn to drugs and/or alcohol as a means of coping

Stats....

- ◆ In a sample of more than 700 police officers from three major police departments, on both the east and west coasts:
 - ◆ About a quarter...
 - Have seen a fellow officer being killed or injured in the line of duty (23%)
 - ◆ About a third...
 - Have been exposed to a badly beaten child (35.9%)
 - Have personally been seriously injured, intentionally (23%)

And more stats....

◇ Around 40 percent...

- Have been exposed to a sexually assaulted child (40.6%)
- Have personally been shot at (38.1%)
- Have been trapped in a life-threatening situation (39.4%)
- Have had to make a death notification (42.1%)

◇ Over half...

- Have been threatened with a gun (50.8%)
- Have been threatened with a knife or other weapon (55.2%)

◇ Nearly all...

- Have seen someone dying (87.2%)[1]
- ◇ Resulting trauma deserves to be recognized and addressed

Strength and Vulnerability

IRONY

Our first responders are uniquely strong, brave, and emotionally flexible. They are called to support us on the worst days of our lives. They see and hear things that are burned into their memories forever. They see the worst in humanity, and then they go home and do their best to be a loving partner, parent, and friend.

- ◇ Much of what we do, the things we see, and the personal risks we take happen outside of the public's collective awareness.

Suicide

- ◆ First responders are at a significantly higher risk of suicide compared to the general population
- ◆ Police officers more likely to die by suicide than by homicide
- ◆ Risk of suicide among police officers is 54% greater than among American workers in general

Cardiovascular Disease and Substance Abuse

Cardiovascular Disease

- ◆ Chronic stress and exposure to traumatic events increase the risk of cardiovascular disease among first responders
- ◆ Police officers, for example, have a 30-40% higher risk of heart disease than the public
- ◆ Fast food, on-the-go diets

Substance Abuse

- ◆ First responders face higher rates of substance abuse as a coping mechanism for the stress and trauma we endure
- ◆ It's estimated that 20-25% of police officers struggle with alcohol use disorders, compared to about 10% of the general population

Burnout and Depression

Burnout and Depression

- ◇ Why can police officers experience higher rates of burnout and depression?
- ◇ What can we do, as leaders to mitigate?

Impact on Families

- ◇ Should we talk about work at home?
- ◇ Ripple effect of trauma on the families of first responders
- ◇ Spouses and children often bear the secondary trauma from their loved ones' experiences

Economic Costs

Recruitment and Retention

Economic Costs

- ◆ Untreated trauma
 - ◆ Increased healthcare costs
 - ◆ Lost productivity
 - ◆ Costs associated with turnover and recruitment when officers leave due to burnout or mental health issues

Retention and Recruitment

- ◆ Growing awareness of the stress and risks in policing is contributing to more difficulty in recruitment and further stressing the system

Trauma Management

- ◆ Removing the stigma
 - ◆ Open departmental discussions
 - ◆ Starts at the top...
- ◆ Create safe spaces
 - ◆ At work and at home
- ◆ Organizational culture of resilience
 - ◆ We're in this together
 - ◆ We learn and grow
- ◆ Work pace and difficulty in decompressing
- ◆ Perception of *Fitness for Duty* Evaluations
- ◆ First line supervisor training

Ted Lasso - You'll never walk alone (ending of S01)



Purpose of Low-Cost Wellness Programs in Policing

- ◆ Wellness must be comprehensive
- ◆ Mesh wellness into the organization's culture, mission, and values
- ◆ How to use an effective wellness program to bolster recruitment and retention of first responders

APD Fit Force Cornerstones



PHYSICAL



EMOTIONAL

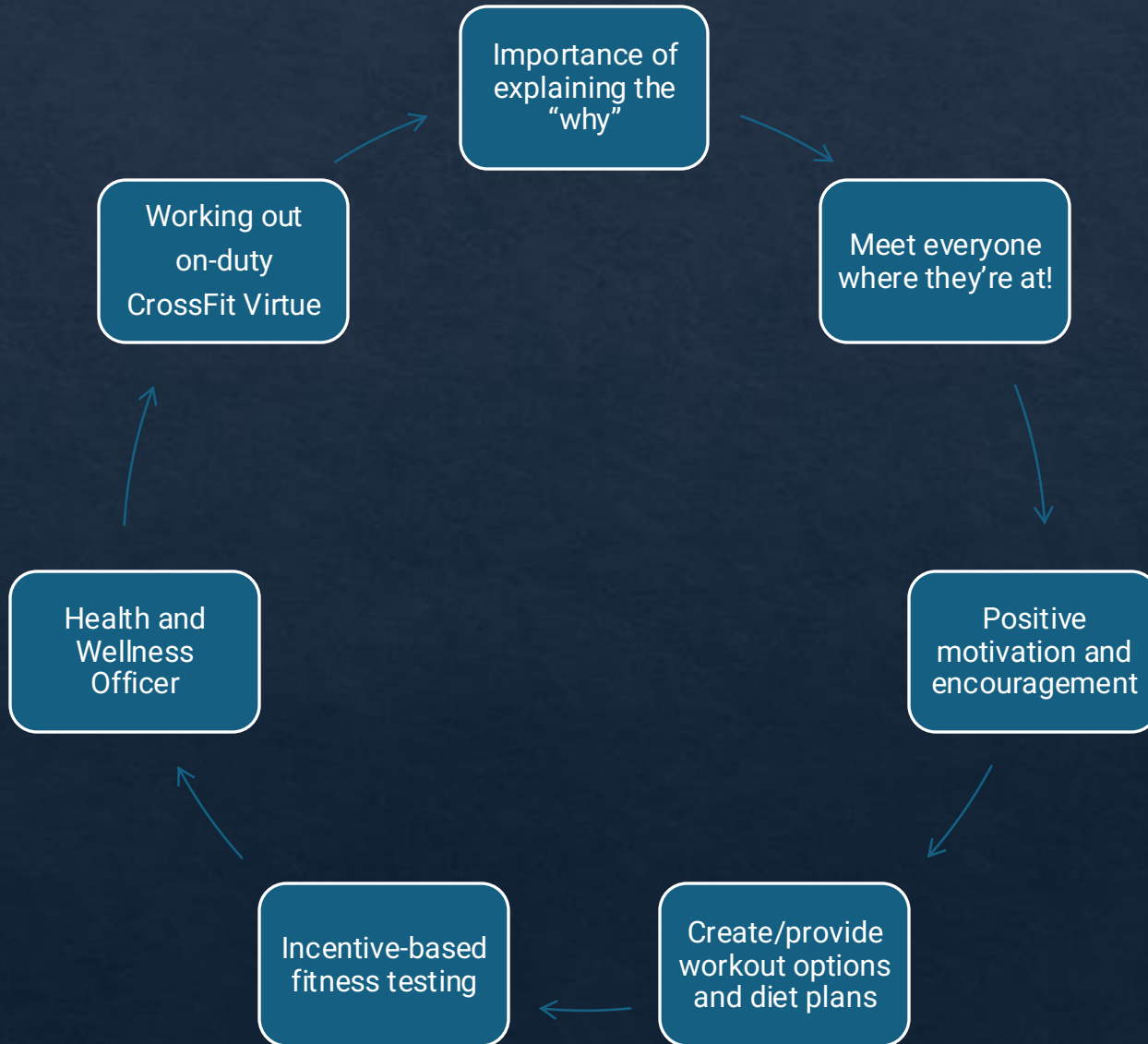


SPIRITUAL



FINANCIAL

Physical



Emotional

- ◇ Confidential and safe environment to lessen skepticism
- ◇ Peer Support Teams and Peer Sharing
 - ◇ Provide debriefings following critical incidents
 - ◇ Individual peer support
 - ◇ Spouse inclusion
- ◇ Facilitation of Referrals
 - ◇ Referrals beyond the OIS
 - ◇ Law Enforcement friendly counselors
 - ◇ Public safety trained EAP Counselors
 - ◇ Referrals for family
 - ◇ Texas Blue Chip Program
- ◇ Education
 - ◇ Understanding critical incident stress
 - ◇ Effects of secondary (vicarious) trauma
 - ◇ Healthy coping

Brené Brown on Empathy



Spiritual



Be involved in something outside of work that doesn't remind you of work!



Provides a safe place for team members to share their emotional wounds and find comfort in the midst of a challenging profession



Unaddressed emotional wounds damage our horizontal relationships and our vertical relationship with a Higher Power



Spiritual maturity is intricately linked to emotional maturity



Head, Hands, and Heart Principle - emphasizes intellectual engagement (Head), emotional intelligence (Heart), and practical action (Hands) as the cornerstone of successful leadership



Examples – Hobbies, Chaplaincy Programs, Religious activities

Financial

Allow first responders to retire when they want to not when they must due to past, poor financial decisions

Help lessen the stress of officers who already work a high stress job

Reduce divorces as financial problems are the #1 cause for marital problems

Increase morale leading to higher productivity

Helps prepare families if the worst happens

Annual financial planning classes

Final thoughts...



Bolster wellness programs to become an integral part of your organization to help improve recruitment and retention – employee participation in every phase!



Public safety programs optimize service levels, improve productivity, and lengthen healthy careers and lives of our team members



Continuously mesh wellness into our organizations' culture, mission, and values

Questions?