

# Introduction

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The major challenge facing the future of our law enforcement profession is not how and why our officers are *dying* but how and why are our officers *suffering*.

A growing body of research about law enforcement professionals indicates that *our* profession is very toxic to those who enter it, as evident in higher than average rates of heart disease, diabetes and cancer, and a lower-than-expected average life expectancy. Police officer suicide, on-the-job fatigue, depression and PTSD are additional serious problems.

When you include other issues like alcohol and drug abuse, relationship problems, domestic violence, financial mismanagement and other issues that attack our personalities, then you might even begin to see the dimensions of the crisis we face: Simply *being* a law enforcement officer may be enough to make sure that you won't live a long, happy and healthy life.

Whether you are a long-time police officer or just considering starting your career in law enforcement, you should ask yourself these crucial questions:

1. Are you willing to sacrifice your life to save the life of another?
2. What are you willing to sacrifice to save your own life?
3. What are you willing to do to save the life of a fellow officer?
4. What are you willing to do to save your own life?

There are many great recommendations out there about what we can do about the problems that undermine our health and the lives of those closest to us.

The *best approach* is a *compound system of approaches*. At the Law Enforcement Survival Institute, we offer comprehensive and systematic training with three programs that can impact your overall health and wellness. These programs are:

- Armor Your Self™
- Armor Your Agency™
- True Blue Valor™

In 2007 a friend of mine who we called “Brother Bob” took his own life. Bob had worked in law enforcement at two different Sheriff’s Departments for over 14 years. He left his last agency as a patrol sergeant and was admired by everyone who worked with him. He retired from law enforcement at age 35 and went to work in his family’s business, which was thriving at that time. Without warning, Bob completed suicide. None of us had a clue it was coming. He did it in his own home so that his peers from the Sheriff’s Office would be the ones to find him. He didn’t leave a suicide note, so no one really knows for sure why he took his life. Like so many other officer suicides I’ve heard about, Bob was always the life of the party, and his suicide devastated his friends and family.

After Bob took his life, I searched high and low for scientifically proven methods to identify and help other cops avoid whatever he went through that ended in his suicide. After all, as law enforcement officers, we are selected to be the most physically and emotionally fit to handle the rigors of protecting our society, and to be able to withstand and tolerate all the ills that create the crime and debauchery that we face.

I found, to no one’s great surprise, that when dealing with human beings there is more art than science in the literature and practices out there. We humans are very complex, and we just don’t know enough about how we work physically, much less mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

When I retired from my career in law enforcement, after 23 years in a Sheriff’s Office and a municipal police department, I described myself as “burned out.” I knew I was becoming overwhelmed by the death, destruction, trauma and tragedy that I saw. I had never been involved in a shooting, but I had seen enough in my work as a hostage negotiator, public information officer and detective. It was affecting my health, behavior and personality. I didn’t believe that I was too emotionally scarred, suffered from PTSD or needed psychiatric treatment, but I knew I needed to get out of the job. I was lucky: I had planned for my retirement, invested well, started several of my own businesses and could leave the job and survive financially.

Don’t misunderstand me. Despite all my good decisions and strategies I suffered, and still suffer, many of the things affecting my brothers and sisters in law enforcement. I have had periods of heavy drinking, sometimes to intentionally drown my sorrows. I have squandered money, been promiscuous, divorced and bankrupt, and I have made some poor choices in life. To this day I still struggle with my fitness and health.

After Bob's death I made a decision to find and develop practical techniques and programs that would strengthen and condition me, my friends and other cops for better health and a better quality of life. I researched techniques that seemed to help other people because I feel that if you have taken an oath to protect and serve your community, you deserve the very best options for success that I can recommend to you. I started writing about these issues at CopsAlive.com in 2008. Since then, I've conducted research, interviewed experts, attended summits and seminars and talked to cops in over 47 countries. My aim is to present the very best information that's out there, and let you decide what works for you.

Someday, science will be able to nail down what strategies best protect a law enforcement professional throughout a long career. But until that research is available, *you* are the one that will have to decide what *you* are willing to do to save *your own* life.

## Definition of Terms

The four components of the Armor Your Self™ concept are **PMES**, which are designed to shield all that makes up your Self **P**hysically, **M**entally, **E**motionally and **S**piritually from all the *threats* that might affect you. That means that this book is about protecting your *body*, your *mind*, your *emotions* and your *spirit*. I think the best way to do that is to strengthen and condition your Self mentally, emotionally and spiritually — just as you would physically.

## The Individual and the Team

This book is also about laying a foundation within our police culture and our agencies so that once we protect ourselves, we will have systems in place in our agencies to support our efforts. So many officers I talk to have gone to great lengths to take care of themselves, and even asked for help, only to be rejected by their peers or their agency because of ignorance, fear, or a lack of courage. This book is designed to change those reactions as well as to help you, the individual, learn to care for yourself and your peers.

## Who is this book for?

This book is for everyone in law enforcement. Though I most often use the term “law enforcement professional” here, I want you to know that this book is also meant for as wide an audience as possible. The tips, tools and techniques described here will help anyone who

works in a stressful job and under extreme pressure. I was a Sheriff's deputy and a municipal police officer; and therefore much of what I write about is based on my own experience and situations I have seen in law enforcement agencies as I have traveled around the world.

At the risk of leaving someone out, I want you to know that this book is for cops and all the people who support them in law enforcement agencies: police officers, Sheriff's deputies, corrections officers, detectives, parole officers, probation officers, dispatchers, communications specialists, police supervisors, law enforcement managers, records clerks, animal control officers, criminalists, crime scene investigators, coroners, coroner's investigators, district attorneys, district attorneys investigators, wildlife officers, fish and game officers, park rangers, military police officers, Air Force security police, Navy shore patrol, NCIS investigators, military police officers from any branch of any military in the world, traffic cops, SWAT cops, vice and narcotics cops, and employees working for any law enforcement or investigative service in the world.

It's also especially for *police families* — police wives, police husbands, police mothers, police fathers, police children, police brothers, police sisters, police officer peers, police officer partners, police survivors and any other extended family.

## ***This book is for all of you!***

In these pages, I use the terms “police officer,” “cop” and “law enforcement officer” interchangeably to refer to all law enforcement professionals. You know who you are — just insert your title where appropriate. The same is true when I use gender terms. I know there are many female law enforcement professionals in many different jobs. I love you for it, and think that we need more of you. But the truth is that most people in this profession are men, so it's the male pronoun that shows up most often. I in no way intend to slight anyone. This book is about helping you survive. Please don't let terminology get in the way.

## **Layer Upon Layer**

In this book you will find lots of tips, techniques, strategies and tools to help you care for yourself and others. They're drawn from the best sources I can find and presented as a series of *layers* to help you build better tactics, habits, systems and organizational culture to support your efforts.

## Here's a quick overview

***Hidden Dangers*** provides tools to do a realistic threat assessment of what could make your life miserable or kill you.

***A New Paradigm*** describes the new model of strategies for how to train ourselves to survive this career intact **PMES** (**P**hysically, **M**entally, **E**motionally and **S**piritually).

***A System of Systems*** outlines how to build layers to support your efforts with systems you can implement individually, along with systems for your organization to use to support you, and systems for all of us to implement to help change and improve our police culture so that we all embrace the need to support and protect each other.

***Change the Culture*** encourages all of us in the law enforcement profession to walk our talk, so that if we declare “We’re all one big family” or “I’ve got your back” or “No one gets left behind,” then we mean what we say and put systems in place to make those statements reality. This builds a model for a system of **True Blue Valor™**.

***Create Comprehensive Agency Support System*** presents the **Armor Your Agency™** process of proven, groundbreaking strategies and best practices to build a system within your agency to support all of the individual strategies employed by the **Armor Your Self™** concept.

***The Tactical Resilience™ Model*** challenges you to identify personal and team tactics you will use in your mission to combat “Blue Trauma Syndrome” and build **Tactical Resilience™**.

***Armor Your Self™ Physically*** lays out everything for a plan to strengthen and condition your Self physically, including a multitude of physical fitness strategies incorporating proper nutrition, proper hydration and getting enough sleep.

***Armor Your Self™ Physically Exercises*** sets forth specific strategies you can incorporate *right away* to strengthen and condition your Self physically.

***Armor Your Self™ Mentally*** charts all that is necessary in strengthening and conditioning your Self mentally, clarifying how mental and emotional strength and conditioning differ, and focusing on important areas of mental fitness, such as multifaceted brain training, visual and auditory conditioning, personal mind-set, mind control techniques, flash recognition training and “trained observer training.”

***Armor Your Self™ Mentally Exercises*** offers specific strategies you can incorporate *right now* to strengthen and condition your Self mentally.

***Armor Your Self™ Emotionally*** shows you everything needed to strengthen and condition your Self emotionally with descriptions of emotional wellness and methods to protect and condition your emotional Self, including arousal control techniques, stress management strategies, tactical breath control, “quiet mind” goals, and work/home buffer time.

***Armor Your Self™ Emotionally Exercises*** includes specific strategies you can incorporate *today* to strengthen and condition your Self emotionally.

***Armor Your Self™ Spiritually*** profiles everything I believe necessary to strengthen and condition your Self spiritually, including discussion of your moral compass, “The Police Perfection Paradox,” law enforcement oaths and ethics, spirituality’s relation to law enforcement, your inner strength and where to find it, the power of faith, tactical trauma control and thoughts on tactical decision making.

***Armor Your Self™ Spiritually Exercises*** advances specific strategies you can incorporate *today and in the future* to strengthen and condition your Self spiritually.

***What We Can Do Now and in the Future*** examines additional opportunities available to us individually and collectively, now and in the future, to improve ourselves, and the quality of our lives, and the lives of those who live in our communities. You will also lay the foundation for your plan to Armor Your Self™ and build Tactical Resilience™.

## How to Use This Book

I have organized this material in a sequence that makes sense to me, based on my experiences. But that's *my* logic. It may not work for *you*. So I suggest you use the table of contents as your personal guide to the topics that you need most right now. Later, you can come back and read other parts of the book. I've also included a list of some of our Web sites at the end of this introduction that may help you find exactly what you're looking for.

You will find that the heart of this book consists of pairs of chapters: one about a central concept, followed by a chapter of practical exercises. I encourage you: *Do not skip the information about the concepts*. Becoming familiar with the concepts will enable you to understand the reasons for the exercises and the research or source behind them. Also, each of the main "PMES" chapters provide information about how to use the materials on tactics to build systems, build habits and build a better police culture in your agency or organization.

You will also find that the kinds of exercises I recommend are different: Some of them are more active, and others are more passive. This stands to reason. When doing physical or mental exercises, you might be very active physically and mentally, but emotional and spiritual exercises ask you to dig more into your mind and your soul. In fact, some exercises require you to be quiet and still, and this will drive some of you crazy! But *all* of these exercises are important because this program is designed to develop you *completely* as a person and as an effective law enforcement professional. If you are not "balanced," you will not be as effective, and you may be more vulnerable to the toxic side effects of your job.

You will find exercises and "homework" for every concept in this book. But there is also a lot of great material out there, and I just couldn't cram it all into this book. So I encourage you to check out the suggested reading lists at the end of each chapter to continue your personal research into how to survive this career.

## WARNING!

I have a long history as a law enforcement trainer, so I think like a trainer and would rather be talking with you. I also believe that you have to "own" this material in order to get anything out of it. For the ideas and exercises in this book to be meaningful, it has to be about *you*, and only *you* can make it meaningful. That's why I will frequently ask you to set the book aside

and write something that is more personalized to your needs as “homework.” To help you with these “assignments” there is a Student Handbook and the Armor Your Self™ Toolkit workbook that go along with the live, on-site seminar so that you can personalize these materials. I urge you either to order these workbooks from The Law Enforcement Survival Institute, or to start your own notebook and keep it ready while you read this book.

## **My Stuff vs. Your Stuff**

Try to keep your notes handy in one place. I recommend a spiral-bound notebook or a tabbed, three-ring binder to organize your notes and thoughts about this material. You may read or reread this material over several months or even years. I encourage you to make notes about how *you* would get these ideas and exercises across to yourself, your colleagues and your agency or organization. What I present here is based on my experiences and the experiences of my close friends. You are different, perhaps very different. Your career may differ from mine; your job assignment may differ from mine. That’s OK, because I’m convinced that no matter who you are and whatever your role in the law enforcement profession, we all share many similarities and, most importantly, we have to look out for one another. My goal is to write about what I know in the hope that you find what I know helps you. I know from experience that it will help you most if you take the time and do the work to write out your own thoughts and beliefs about your experiences in this career.

## **Now, words about why I trademarked these concepts**

I have very specific goals in mind for the development of The Law Enforcement Survival Institute and the materials on all of our Web sites. My primary mission is to continue researching and developing materials to help law enforcement professionals around the world survive their careers and be able to live happy, healthy, productive lives, both while working and well into retirement.

Unfortunately, there just isn’t enough research out there about the members of law enforcement. I intend to change that. I want our institute and foundation to grow and develop more and better tools and techniques to help cops. Please stay in touch with what we are doing, because I will always welcome your suggestions and assistance.

To that end I plan to create a nonprofit foundation to support development of these tools and techniques. There is so much more we need to know about how toxic of a career this is on us as human beings and on how we can best survive 10, 20 or even 30 years in this line of work. To be able to do that I have created a rigorous business model that will allow our institute to grow and to fund our foundation. My hope is that if these principles are universally accepted by members of our profession then the proceeds from our publications, training programs and Web sites will further work long after I am dead and buried.

You will also notice that I've created a lot of my own terminology to describe some of the things that I am talking about. The goal is to more accurately communicate my message, because it's best that we all first get on the same page so that we can have a vigorous and spirited discussion on these topics. The trademarks also help to protect the materials from dilution by others using the same terms. Please understand that I mean no disrespect to any other law enforcement author, trainer, leader, psychologist or educator. I just feel it's important to use terms that we can define, and that we maintain control of these definitions.

## How is this book different from others?

1. *Here you'll find practical exercises written by a fellow cop.* I'm not a psychologist.

I'm a cop who experienced a lot of the *hidden dangers* mentioned here. I'm also not a scientist, but I am a researcher who sees many problems that are not being addressed. And I'm not a police chief, but I am a leader who sees a need for our profession to improve.

2. *This book is more comprehensive than many others* which are usually focused on only one or two of the Physical, Mental, Emotional or Spiritual topic categories.

You may find that these ideas would also probably be helpful to most ordinary people. But since you're in law enforcement, you're *not* ordinary, and neither are the negative stresses and threats you face. I hope this information, although new and very different from what you may be used to, will be helpful and perhaps even save, lengthen and improve your life.

If you bought a digital copy of this book, then please take advantage of its many Web links, which will make your additional reading and research much easier. If you're reading a

printed copy of this book, please copy these Web links into your Web browser to do further research. Either way, you'll have access to as much information as possible to make your journey through this process as personal and specific as you need.

If you would like to take this course online, visit the Armor Your Self™ Web site.

<http://www.ArmorYourSelf.com>

Additionally, if you have read the book or taken the course already, you can join our ongoing membership program. There you will learn new techniques and new exercises every month.

<http://www.ArmorYourSelf.com/members>

Some of our other Web sites\* that you may find useful are:

<http://www.LawEnforcementSurvivalInstitute.org>

<http://www.CopsAlive.com>

<http://www.TrueBlueValor.com>

<http://www.PoliceWellness.com>

<http://www.PoliceMeditations.com>

<http://www.TacticalResilience.org>

<http://www.YouTube.com/CopsAlive>

<http://www.YouTube.com/SurvivalTipsForCops>

<http://www.ArmorYourSelf.com>

<http://www.ArmorYourAgency.com>

<http://www.BloggingForCops.com>

<http://www.SurviveAPoliceCareer.com>

<http://www.FRBB.us>

<http://www.AskCopsAlive.com>

*\* As of this writing, not all of these are active yet. But we have big plans, so stay tuned!*

Stay safe, and take good care of your Self!

John Marx

May 2017