

Building Community Support & Public Trust: An Action Plan for Law Enforcement

We must start from the premise that healthy law enforcement professionals provide better policing services. Sadly, many of our communities want to reduce police equipment, police training and even the numbers of our police officers. We are each focused on different things, or are we?

Problem

Current news reports are rife with stories about communities clashing with their police departments and these clashes include citizen complaints about excessive force, police misconduct, bullying and “cultures of aggression”. At the same time law enforcement industry publications are concerned about PTSD, police officer suicides, depression, alcohol problems, prescription drug abuse and ethical compromise.

Is it possible that all of these issues have roots in the same causes? Could it be that we are not properly preparing our young law enforcement professionals to manage all the negative stresses that confront them in their jobs? Is it possible that we are not doing enough to adequately train and support these professionals, and that somewhere during their careers they are suffering in silence or being turned astray by all the traumas and tragedies they endure?

Solution

Negative stress is an interesting enemy. You can't see it, you can't touch it, and most of the time you can't even describe it. But it's there, and the effects it creates can attack us every day. We must also acknowledge and master the useful effects of stress while defending ourselves, and armoring ourselves, from the cumulative effects of negative stress, otherwise a career's worth of battle fatigue will overtake us.

Even a small amount of introspection will reveal this is true for the vast majority of us in law enforcement. Few of us are born with a body or personality that is resilient enough to withstand all the negative stresses and trauma this job brings, that's why we need to train and condition ourselves to build Tactical Resilience™.

Tactical Resilience™

Tactical Resilience™ is defined as a human quality of intentional strength and fitness exhibited through the mind, body, brain and spirit of a police officer or other law enforcement or military professional that allows them to withstand the rigors and hidden emotional, physical, spiritual and physiological dangers of continuous high-threat, high-stress situations.

We need this change in our language to more appropriately discuss the issues that are affecting our health and operational readiness. Rather than using the generic terms of “stress” or “negative stresses” consider another new term called “Blue Trauma Syndrome”.

"Blue Trauma Syndrome"

Through the Law Enforcement Survival Institute we have defined Blue Trauma Syndrome as a spectrum of negative physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health effects manifested by many

people in law enforcement. Blue Trauma Syndrome most certainly has its roots in large, or cumulative, doses of negative occupational stress which surface in the form of negative physiological, mental, emotional and spiritual symptoms.

Whatever you call it, the effects of prolonged service in law enforcement, and the military, can functionally disable some, and severely impact many others.

Our choice is simple. We need to find ways to strengthen and condition ourselves to better handle all the negative effects of the job, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Once we have strengthened and conditioned ourselves in all of these ways we will be better able to provide the kinds of professional policing services demanded by our 21st century public.

A Three-Pronged Strategy

Consider a three-part strategy that involves: strengthening the individual; strengthening the agency's support system for those individuals; and creating a positive culture of health and wellness within our law enforcement profession. All three of these tactics can work in unison to promote officer and agency resilience and help to bolster the public trust. Without all three, however, the other two may not function effectively. Additionally, as part of building a stronger more vital law enforcement officer, agency and culture we must include proactive community building initiatives that further help to foster positive law enforcement service and also works to promote community cooperation and support.

First We Must Strengthen Our People

Policing is about people. This includes both the people that work with us to provide policing services and the people we serve. We must put people first in order to ensure the public's faith in our ability to serve. Healthy, resilient law enforcement officers are more likely to provide higher quality and ethically sound policing services and a healthy, engaged community is more likely to support and communicate with the law enforcement agencies that serve them.

We go to great lengths to recruit and hire the best people into law enforcement. We test them physically and mentally and we evaluate their intelligence, integrity and communication skills. We train them and equip them with all that they need to begin the career but then, for the most part, we let them coast downhill for the rest of their careers.

Even though we have high expectations for our people's physical fitness at the beginning of their careers we struggle to encourage them to maintain it for very long. We are challenged by the concepts of enforcing physical fitness standards and the prospects of regular fitness testing. We get push back by many even for the best of incentive programs. This situation is concerning when you consider that recent findings from the BCOPS Study released in July 2012 showed that 40 percent of the officers in the study were obese compared with 32 percent of the general population. Additionally, more than 25 percent of the officers in the study had metabolic syndrome, which is a collection of negative health factors, compared with 18.7 percent of the general population. This study may or may not be representative of the entire population of U.S. law enforcement but nonetheless should be alarming as a potential trend.

Even though we hire people with the right emotional and psychological make up we don't do much to maintain that, much less evaluate it for the rest of their careers. With law enforcement suicide statistics showing that at very least twice as many officers take their own lives than are murdered in the line of duty, perhaps we have another problem we need to address as a profession.

Compassionate and ethical policing is a challenge even for the most mature law enforcement professional, yet we have few academy classes nor in-service training programs, to encourage the development of our beliefs about honor and integrity. Most of us don't participate in regular discussion about, or evaluation of, our mission, values and goals. When a candidate or new recruit says, "I want to help people" we cynically laugh and brush that concept off as naive, yet we really have no concept of how to nurture, encourage and maintain that community service mentality.

As a profession we must find a way to raise the standards of our people in order for them to have the personal resilience to protect them from the toxic nature of their jobs. We need to be strengthening and conditioning our people physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually in order for them to endure that the negative stresses, and rigors, of a career in law enforcement.

Our Communities Will Be Stronger If We Are Stronger

If we train and condition ourselves how to successfully endure all varieties of suffering and injury while building strength physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually we will be better able to perform our duties at the best of our abilities, as well as be able to survive the toxic nature of a long career in law enforcement.

If we regularly and properly train and condition ourselves physically we will be better able to have the good health, stamina, physical strength, running speed and arrest control skills we need to be successful in this career. We will also have promoted the proper nutritional, hydration and sleep management habits needed to support a long and healthy life. Simply doing a 10-minute comprehensive fitness routine every workday during your work shift is an excellent tactic to use to maintain or improve your level of physical fitness.

If we regularly, and properly, train and condition ourselves mentally we will be better able to maintain the cognitive functions we need as law enforcement professionals to maintain our edge in reaction time, investigative intuition, memory and communication skills. We will have a heightened visual acuity and we will be better able to perform complex problem solving functions. The jury is still out but there is some research to indicate that by exercising our cognitive abilities we may be able to thwart, or forestall, brain function decline in the later years of our lives. Solving logic problems, word or math problems or finding a useful online brain-training program is a simple and effective way to build your cognitive function each day.

If we regularly and properly train and condition ourselves emotionally we will be better able to regulate and control our fear, anger and levels of frustration as well as being better able to summon the needed courage, tenacity and persistence to best perform our duties. Taking just 15 minutes a day to have some quiet time to allow your mind and emotions to calm and reset will work wonders toward building your mental clarity and emotional strength. Try building in a 15

minute buffer time between work and home to allow your emotions to reset before reengaging with family, friends and the “real world”.

If we regularly and properly train and condition ourselves spiritually we will be more capable of maintaining the highest levels of honor, integrity, honesty and compassion. If we commit to doing the work regularly we will promote greater self-awareness, maturity and a faith in ourselves, humankind and perhaps a higher power. An examination of our own inner strength leads to greater connection to all that is around us, and to a better understanding of the human condition, all of which can be helpful in law enforcement. The human spirit, as with all the other qualities of the human being, needs to be nourished and replenished in everyone, but especially in those who have chosen law enforcement as a way of life. Giving yourself ten to fifteen minutes each day to examine your beliefs, values and opinions about major life concepts will give you much greater clarity and self awareness which in turn will help you be effective as one of societies peacekeepers. Consider writing out your thoughts in a computer or journal so you can follow your progress over time.

By changing our mindset and practicing some simple daily wellness tactics we can accomplish all of these things and establishing some very effective personal and professional habits that should last a lifetime while at the same time helping to build the necessary commitment to our profession and our community. If we do all of these things regularly we will be better able to form the kinds of bonds with our community members we need to provide excellent policing services.

Create Agency Support Programs

Healthy Agencies support healthy personnel who in turn build healthy communities. That process can then build the public's trust in our people and organizations. Some of the ways we can support healthy employees is to have programs that support their physical, psychological and spiritual health.

Consider the benefits that of some of these programs would have on your personnel:

- Mentoring programs for all levels of the organization
- Proactive peer support coupled with an anonymous crisis hotline for emergency help.
- A law enforcement chaplain's program
- A family support communications network
- Law enforcement oriented psychological services
- Annual resilience reinforcement training and educational programs
- A critical incident support system for extreme incidents
- A support program for the survivors of line of duty deaths and suicides
- Medical, health and wellness services and education
- A wellness program of education and assessment about proper nutrition and fitness
- An organizational fitness program which may include paid or volunteer fitness trainers
- An agency resource library of books, videos and computer based wellness materials

- An organizational intervention plan for employees in crisis as well as
- An employee recovery case management process, and finally
- A separation process that supports on-going wellness activities in retirement

Finally as the leaders within our agencies we need to address our professions suicide rate. Please consider initiating a law enforcement suicide prevention training and tracking program. See the resource list below for a recommendation for a simple and short program that can be provided in roll calls and staff meetings.

Create a Culture of Wellness And Support

Finally, we need to create a culture of wellness and support within our profession. We need to walk our talk when we say “I’ve got your back” or “We are all one big family” then we should mean it and follow through with actions to support those words. Words alone don’t get the job done but backing up your message with positive actions to support and encourage your peers is what’s needed. Positive mindset can become contagious if enough of us are promoting successful, healthy cops. Our agencies need to have the above-mentioned programs in place and everyone needs to be a leader in supporting and encouraging each other. It takes a huge amount of courage to support your peers and more to challenge them when they are slipping and not taking care of their fitness and health.

Creating A Positive, Healthy Law Enforcement Culture For The 21st Century Requires Three Things

1. Leadership at all levels of your organization
2. Long-term commitment to change
3. Action steps that get the job done

As the President’s task force works to mobilize it’s recommendations for 21st Century Policing we all need to take up the slack and tighten our policies, procedures and behaviors to stay in step with the public expectations our performance. With heightened scrutiny and over zealous media coverage law enforcement is being probed and examined more than at any point in our history. We need to rise to the occasion, and better police ourselves, lest we be put under massively restrictive external controls. All of this pressure only adds to the internal physiological stresses experienced by the typical law enforcement professional.

For years we have easily dismissed what law enforcement officers experience as just “stress” but stress isn’t only a negative factor in human physiology.

Honest Communication Is Key

All critical forms of human interaction, whether in policing, police management or community building, require quality communication skills.

In all three parts of our strategy, self awareness as well as open and honest communications are required between the people within our profession, as well as between us and the public we serve. We must recognize that everyone has a role as leader in building a positive and sustainable collaboration with the people we serve.

Concepts like community policing and neighborhood based policing services need to remain lively along with the processes of innovation, collaboration and service.

The time is now for those of us in law enforcement to take responsibility for our health and well being by making the commitment to strengthen and condition ourselves to better handle all the negative effects of the job. We need to spend time every day to develop ourselves physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Once we have strengthened ourselves we need to ensure that our agencies have the support programs in place to support those who come into this career after us. Finally we need promote to a positive culture of wellness within our law enforcement profession so that we will be better able to provide the kinds of professional policing services demanded by our public.

Resources To Support You And Your Agency

President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing Interim Report

Find the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing Interim Report - March 2015

Source: http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/taskforce/Interim_TF_Report.pdf Web - accessed 6-18-15

Police Suicide Prevention

Create your own police suicide prevention training program in just 3 Easy Steps.

1. Download the video "Breaking the Silence: Suicide Prevention in Law Enforcement" from YouTube and show it to your roll call or staff group.
2. Pair it with our CopsAlive.com 10 Minute Roll Call Discussion Guide "Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention – Take Charge"
3. Establish your plan for any interventions and post the Safe Call Now crisis hotline for first responders phone number 1–206–459–3020 around your agency.

This video "Breaking the Silence: Suicide Prevention in Law Enforcement" was posted on YouTube by Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas the Executive Director of the Carson J Spencer Foundation through their work with the Working Minds suicide prevention organization, the Denver PD and Kenosha PD.

<http://www.copsalive.com/suggests?videobreakingsilence/fbileb>

Download our 10 minute roll call discussion guide on stress management entitled: "Law Enforcement Suicide Prevention – Take Charge" at:

<http://www.copsalive.com/suggests?officersuicideprev/fbileb>

You no longer have an excuse for not having a program. With this new video produced by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the Working Minds Program and the Carson J Spencer Foundation, and our CopsAlive.com roll call discussion guide you can create a ready made program the moment you finish reading this article.

Consider downloading our Law Enforcement Survival Institute report and action guide entitled: **"Building Community Support & Public Trust: An Action Plan for Law Enforcement"** available at www.CopsAlive.com/PublicSupport

Finally, also consider reviewing the IACP document **“Building Trust Between the Police and the Citizens They Serve: An Internal Affairs Promising Practices Guide for Local Law Enforcement”** at:

Source: <http://www.theiacp.org/portals/0/pdfs/BuildingTrust.pdf> web accessed 6-18-15

It offers excellent strategies such as:

- Internal Strategies for Building Community Trust
- External Strategies for Building Community Trust

The Appendices include:

- A Sample Recruitment Plan
- A Sample Performance Improvement Policy, Procedure, and Plan
- A Sample Community Survey
- CALEA Standards for Law Enforcement Agencies—Chapter 52 on Internal Affairs
- IACP Concepts and Issues Paper and Model Policy on the Investigation of Employee Misconduct
- Funding Sources for Training and Software on Ethics and Internal Affairs

Glossary Of Terms In This Article:

The **Armor Your Agency™** concept helps law enforcement and other agencies armor and strengthen their people, and organizational culture, to build and sustain Tactical Resilience™. This also includes the concepts of Armor Your Self™ and True Blue Valor™ as protection against the stresses and traumas inherent in high stress and high-risk careers in law enforcement and the military.

The **Armor Your Self™** concept is a series of tactics that help police officers, other law enforcement and military professionals armor, or protect, themselves physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. They do this by building a series of comprehensive health habits that work together in systems that promote Tactical Resilience™.

"Blue Trauma Syndrome"

A spectrum of negative physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health effects manifested by many in law enforcement. Blue Trauma Syndrome most certainly has its roots in large or cumulative doses of negative occupational stress, and surfaces in the form of negative physiological, mental, emotional and spiritual symptoms.

Community Trust

Community trust is a fragile quantity that can dissolve or break over time if not properly nurtured and promoted. The community trust or public trust is a commitment we make and a relationship we must continuously develop. Maintaining the public trust is a law enforcement mandate as well as a critical policing mission. It is not something to take lightly or for granted. If you or your agency are constantly monitoring it you are very likely to lose it. Once lost, it is very difficult to regain. Maintaining public trust is much easier than rebuilding it.

Professional Police Athlete

The concept of being professional police athletes is a mindset of both law enforcement personnel and management. It is about adopting a mindset of excellence and dedication that promotes the best in health maintenance as well as personal and career enhancement. It is a philosophy of life time commitment to maintaining the highest levels of human performance, and also involves the management philosophy of coaching for excellence instead of just supervising.

Tactical Resilience™

Tactical Resilience™ is a human quality of strength and fitness exhibited through the mind, body, brain and spirit of a police officer or other law enforcement or military professional that allows them to withstand the rigors and hidden emotional, physical, spiritual and physiological dangers of continuous high-threat, high-stress situations.

The **True Blue Valor™** concept involves the strength and courage it takes for one law enforcement officer to confront another peer who is slipping both professionally, and personally, and endangering themselves, their peers and the public. It takes a system of organizational support and professional leadership to support and foster the concept of True Blue Valor™. True Blue Valor™ is about walking your talk so that if you say “no one gets left behind” or “we are all one big family” or “I’ve got your back” or “we take care of our own” you will mean it and their will be systems in place to ensure that these words are true and accurate.

The concept of True Blue Valor™ builds a stronger law enforcement culture that helps law enforcement and other agencies armor and strengthen their people and organizational cultures to develop and sustain Tactical Resilience™. This concept works in conjunction with the concepts of Armor Your Self™ and Armor Your Agency™.

About The Author:

John Marx, CPP is the Executive Director of The Law Enforcement Survival Institute and founder of CopsAlive.com. He has created the training programs entitled: “Armor Your Self™: How To Survive A Career In Law Enforcement”, “How To Armor Your Agency™”, and “How To Create A Positive Law Enforcement Culture With True Blue Valor™”. John was a police officer for twenty-three years and served as a hostage negotiator for nineteen of those years. He worked as a patrol officer, media liaison officer, crime prevention officer and burglary detective. Also during his career he served as administrator of his city's Community Oriented Governance Initiative through the police department's community policing project. John retired from law enforcement in 2002. When one of his friends, a former Sheriff's Sergeant, committed suicide at age 38, John began researching the problems that cumulative stress creates for police officers. He decided he needed to do something to help correct those problems and he also wanted to give something back to the profession that gave him so much. He started writing on CopsAlive.com and that has evolved into the creation of The Law Enforcement Survival Institute and its training programs.

Action Planning: Everyone Is A Leader!

Use the attached Action Planning Worksheet to make your plan for action today!

Action Planning Worksheet

Describe Your Vision For The Project:

What Outcomes Do You Desire?

List All The Stakeholders Who Need To Participate:

List All The Resources You Need To Complete This Project:

List All Your Goals For This Project:

List All The Objectives Need To Meet The Goals For This Project:

Write Out A Time Line Listing All The Objectives And Deadlines For The Project:

It's good to have some goals but without a plan to implement them you won't get too far. Successful action planning comes from deliberate planning and action steps. Consider the following as a guideline for your action planning process.

1. Analyze Needs & Assemble the Resources to Achieve Your Plan
2. Set Specific and Attainable Goals
3. Set Specific Objectives with Detailed Units of Measurement
4. Utilize Deadlines to Stay on Track
5. Set Responsibilities for Others and Take Responsibility Yourself
6. Take Action (Just Do It!)
7. Evaluate Your Progress (Both Successes and Failures)
8. Make Corrections as Needed
9. Continue or Cancel and Put Your Energy Somewhere Else

Take Action Now!

First Steps:

Define Your First Critical Goal: _____

Objective	Needs	Resources	Deadline	By Whom
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Continue onto next page

Define Your Second Critical Goal: _____

Objective	Needs	Resources	Deadline	By Whom
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

After 30 Days Do a Critical Evaluation of Your Project:

What Are You Missing?

Who Are You Missing?

What Course Corrections Are Needed to Meet Your Goals?