

# Hugh Bruder - Episode 854

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

firefighters, people, department, mental health, fire, fire chief, first responders, fire department, peer support, work, day, service, miami dade, chief, trauma, james, union, listen, years, individuals

## SPEAKERS

James Geering

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James Geering 00:00

I'm extremely excited to announce a brand new sponsor for the behind the shield podcasts that is transcend. Now for many of you listening, you are probably working the same brutal shifts that I did for 14 years suffering from sleep deprivation, body composition challenges, mental health challenges libido, hair loss excetera. Now, when it comes to the world of hormone replacement and peptide therapy, what I've seen is a shift from doctors telling us that we were within normal limits, which was definitely incorrect all the way to the other way now where men's clinics are popping up, left, right and center. So I myself wanted to find a reputable company that would do an analysis of my physiology, and then offer supplementations without ramming, for example, hormone replacement therapy down my throat. Now I came across transcend because they have an altruistic arm. And they were a big reason why the 7x project I was a part of was able to proceed because of their generous donations. They also have the Transcend Foundation's, where they're actually putting military and first responders through some of their therapies at no cost to the individual. So my own personal journey so far, filled in the online form, went to quest got blood drawn, and a few days later, I'm talking to one of their wellness professionals as they guide me through my results and the supplementation that they suggest. In my case, specifically, because I transitioned out the fire service five years ago and be very diligent with my health, my testosterone was actually in a good place. So I went down the peptide route and some other supplements to try and maximize my physiology. Knowing full well the damage that 14 years of shift work has done. Now I also want to underline because I think this is very important that each of the therapies they offer, they will talk about the pros and cons. So for example, a lot of first responders in shift work or testosterone will be low, but sometimes nutrition exercise and sleep can offset that on its own. So this company is not going to try and push you down a path, especially if it's one that you can't come back from. So whether it's libido brain fog, inflammation, gut health, performance sleep, this is definitely one of the most powerful tools in the toolbox. So to learn more, go to [transcendcompany.com](https://transcendcompany.com) or listen to episode 808 of the behind the shield podcast with founder Ernie Colling. This episode is sponsored by NuCalm and as many of you know I only bring sponsors onto the show whose products I truly swear by. Now we are an overworked and underslept population, especially those of us that wear uniform for a living and trying to reclaim some of the lost rest and recovery is imperative. Now the application of this product is as simple as putting on headphones and asleep mask. As you listen to music on each of the programs there is neuro

acoustic software Beneath that is tapping into the actual frequencies of your brain, whether to up regulate your nervous system, or down regulate. Now for most of us that come off shift we are exhausted and do not want to bring what we've had to see and do back home to our loved ones. So one powerful application is using the program power nap, a 20 minute session that will not only feel like you've had two hours of sleep, but also downregulate from a hyper vigilant state back into the role of mother or father, husband or wife. Now there are so many other applications and benefits from the software. So I urge you to go and listen to episode 806 with CEO Jim Poole. Then download NuCalm and you see a LM from your app store and sign up for the seven day free trial. Not only will you have an understanding of the origin story and the four decades this science has spanned, but also see for yourself the incredible health impact of this life changing software. And you can find even more information on [nucalm.com](http://nucalm.com) Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show. The chief of Boynton Beach Fire Department Hugh Bruder. Now the reason why I'm so excited about this conversation is I have been trying to bring sleep deprivation into the firefighter physical and mental wellness conversation for seven years now since the inception of this podcast, whether we're talking about physiological ill health cancer, heart disease, obesity, autoimmune disease, strokes, or mental health, overdose suicide, depression, anxiety addiction. Sleep deprivation is the elephant in the room when it comes to these conversations. So as you will hear we discuss a host of topics and he leads us through many of the areas that he had to address with obviously the team around him from his fire department to educate his employer the city of now Not only the financial savings of investing in his fire department, but also the impact on their mental and physical health, recruitment, and camaraderie. Now, before we get to this conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of over 850 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories, so I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So that being said, I introduce to you, chief Hugh Bruder. Enjoy. You I want to start by saying Firstly, thank you to your brother, Barry brooder, who was on the show a few weeks ago for connecting us and secondly, to welcome you to the behind the show podcast today.



06:22

Well, thank you very much, James, I'm actually honored to be on your podcast, you become a very well known, you know, individual who's trying to bring light to a lot of issues affecting brothers and sisters, not only, you know, in the fire service, but you know, as your podcast name, you know, intimate the shield, you know, you're, you're there for police officers, firefighters and veterans, you're trying to move the ball forward in a positive way. And, you know, that's kind of what I'm all about, and why I went back to the fire service after retiring. So for me, I'm honored to be here, I'm honored to share with you the lessons that I've learned in my experience. And, and, you know, of course, that included is this along my travels and along my universal journey. But yeah, I'd love to be here and share it with you. And at the end of the day, the bottom line is we want to make it better. You know, there's an old saying I learned from a chief many, many, many years ago. And I'm actually going into year 44 in public service. And a great old chief, you know, used to say to me, you know, it's we don't want to leave it better than we, that we found it. And I know that's corny and I'm a very corny guy and idealistic, nationalistic kind of guy. So you're going to hear a lot of that stuff from me as we move through this, this, you know, this interview, but, but I'm honored to be here and thank you for the opportunity to share what I what I

 James Geering 07:43

really am. Well, I mean, I'm very excited about this conversation, we're going to be bringing a lot of solutions to problems and that's the whole point of this podcast is find people who've who've been able to navigate issues a lot of us deal with and rather than just be a bitch session, you know, let's let's actually explore how we can move forward. As you know, we just discussed I just spent a couple days in Pensacola with another group is trying to take a different stance on the whole thing. But then we've obviously got, you know, your department which has lived experience, and you've actually able to make some some phenomenal changes. But before we get to that part, I want to start with your journey just so we know, you know who you are and the perspectives that you've got through your career, and then it'll take us to Boynton Beach. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did, how many siblings

 08:33

so yeah, thanks. I was born in 1962. And Buffalo, New York. Buffalo was a great town to be from if you're a football fan, you either love or hate the bills and and I was also a hockey fan growing up. But I grew up in Buffalo right on the border of Canada. And I mean, it's just a great place to be from it's a very dynamic city, unfortunately, was hit very, very hard because it was an industrial city. So as you moved forward from the 1800s, to the 1900s into the 2000s Buffalo really took a major dramatic economic hit. But But after the dreaded blizzard of 77 My parents said no moss and they decided that they were going to move to Florida. And in a way my brother and I went so why moved down here my sophomore year of high school. And, and for me, it was it was actually a very, very difficult transition from Buffalo because I was very heavily involved in sports. I was on the snow ski team. I was a football player. I played football for 10 years, actually from age eight to 18. So you know, a lot of these things were very important to me and you know, leaving my my guys and my team and all that was was very difficult, but I made the transition to Florida and in 1980 just after the post Vietnam era, I was decided I was going to be a firefighter And, and my brother, I have one sibling, my brother Perry, as you know, and it was funny because everyone thought I was crazy. Everyone said, you want to do what? And I was like, Well, you know, I always kind of grew up wanting to help people, you know it. And I know, it's idealistic, as I said earlier, but, you know, I was a boy scout, you know, as a young guy, and I enjoyed helping other people, it just kind of came natural to me. And interestingly enough, it came natural to my brother. And as you kind of parallel our journeys, what's interesting is, you know, Barry went one route, and I went to public service route, but but if you look at it, on the whole, it's very interesting. Because our parents didn't really put any emphasis on this public service, you know, they were not really even business oriented. They just were the kind of simple folks that went along and, and did their thing. And, you know, there was, you know, there wasn't an Einstein in the bunch, everyone was pretty much regular folks and went through their life. But But it's interesting, um, Barry and I simultaneously going on our own paths, both chose lives of service. And, and for me, it just seemed like, it's a natural, it seemed like it was something that I wanted to do. And it seemed as though in other words, I think at that age, I did realize that, in my opinion, I'm a man of faith. So at that young age, I didn't look at it as I was being guided or was used as a tool, or whatever the case may be, if you do believe in a higher power, or you do believe in God and faith, and I do believe that and, and I believe, to some degree, I was guided by that. Today, I feel much differently. And I feel those blessings in that that life of service. And I'll get into it

much later in our conversation, because I think it's extremely important for those in the fire service and those who serve to understand the why, why am I here? What am I doing? What does it mean? So it's a very deep existential conversation here at the base of being a first responder. That could probably be its own its own podcast, but but to get back to me, so I joined the Air Force in 1980, I was an Air Force firefighter, stayed in the military about 10 years, three years active duty, and then remained seven more years in the US Air Force Reserves. It was a wonderful opportunity. I got to travel all over the world, Europe, the Middle East, I was stationed in the UK for almost two years, and I just I had a wonderful, wonderful experience living amongst the people of of Britain, Great Britain, just a beautiful, wonderful country. The taxes are crazy over there. And everyone complains that their taxes are too high. But But what a beautiful people and I really enjoyed my time in England very much. I actually, before I came back to the United States, in the Air Force, you put on a dream sheet dream sheet is your wish list of where you want to go. And when I did my four years of active duty, I didn't want to come back to the United States. So that was finished. I wanted to go to the Orient for for a couple years and really explore and enjoy. But you know what happened, I got to work. homestead Air Force Base, which is where I actually, you know, went into the military was from Miami. So you know, at that point, when I got orders to homestead, I realized that, you know, I was going to start moving towards getting out of the military and going towards what what in the military we call civility and fire services, even though for us, it's first responders, we're not we don't consider ourselves to be aliens, but in the military world, even a firefighter or a police officer is still considered civilian. You know, you talk about things that shape your life. And, and I've had many experiences that have shaped my life, I think I would I think I never would have moved into becoming a first responder if it wasn't for that stinkin show emergency in the 70s that had Roy DeSoto and Johnnie gage running around and LA, saving people's lives. I mean, that that was the first glimpse that I had of, of the Fire Service said it was extremely interesting to me. And back in that post Vietnam era, it was very difficult to get hired on the fire department, not not to speak poorly of affirmative action and all the policies that happen in that post Vietnam era. But I was actually a product of the opposite end of that, where, you know, I was scoring super high on all the exams, but there were all these hiring mandates. So it was it was actually difficult for me to get hired. And I don't really have an opinion either way, on the whole subject, but I can tell you that as a result, I decided that I was going to go in the Air Force attended that and I was able to travel all over, James. Before I came back for 30 days I traveled by, by year our paths to every single at the time free country in Europe and that experience as a 19 year old traveling Europe with no Americans by the way. My whole journey was with British, British and Irish nationals who I became friends with. So I literally traveled by backpack and a tent on my back every single country in Europe and it was it was a measurable experience because as much as a lot of people in the United States don't really, you know, they jump on the bandwagon of how much they love their country. But until you leave this country, do you realize how good you have a year, it's no different than firefighters talk about the grass is always greener. And if you work for a small department, wow, you want to go to work for that Metro department, right. And then if you work for the bigger department, you're like, oh, you know, I'm just a number here. I want to work for the smaller department. So once I left the military, I decided I was going to go ahead and really try to get into a civilian Fire Department. I was my training chief in the Air Force was the number two guy in Ocean Reef Fire Rescue tiny little department in the keys. And that's where I was hired first, when I got out of the military. Funny story, they actually were working 48 hour on 48 hour off shifts at the time. And very unusual. And I'd actually come out of the military, where we worked 24 on 24 off in the military. So and that was actually like a 70 Something hour work week. So that that's crazy. So as we move in, and we start transitioning into mental health and work schedules and work reductions and sleep deprivation, or you go back to my beginning years, as you know, the talk about a heavy workweek, you know, yeah, so I worked for Ocean Reef for about a year and, you know,

obviously I wasn't I knew it wasn't going to stay there. My my sights the entire time. When I got out of the military were on Miami Dade or at the time Metro Dade Fire Rescue. I wanted to work for a very large agency that offered the ability to to promote and offered a wide variety of opportunities within the fire service. So in my mindset, that's what I want. So from Ocean Reef, I went to work for Lauderdale lakes Fire Rescue, very, very busy little department in in West Fort Lauderdale area, Oakland Park, Fort Lauderdale. I was there for a year. Interesting. We ran there as a medic firefighter,



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we averaged a cardiac arrest every single shift. So average age was about 70 at the time of the resident events. So, you know, running a cardiac arrest, or to every shift makes you a really, you know, good medic and hones your skills. Not to mention, obviously, the trauma calls that you know, we received over there, but I did Lauderdale lakes for a year that I went to hallandale for a year. And then I went to to Dade County, and I retired from Dade County Fire Rescue in 2015. And when I retired, I just I just wasn't done, you know, I knew that I wanted to give back. And and I'll begin to talk a little bit about my is his journey. But to go back to Miami Dade Fire Rescue, I have to tell you, it was it was an absolute wonderful experience for me. You know, I worked myself up through the ranks. Firefighter, driver, operator engineer, and Lieutenant Captain EMS captain, Chief Officer, where I was a battalion chief was the staffing chief was the first or actually second staffing chief that they had. And I was very instrumental in, in helping to make a transition from paper rosters and that sort of thing into into electronic rostering systems. I was kind of the liaison between, you know, the computer guys and the operations folks to try to you know, put policies not to the computer this was that kind of shift back in 2004 2005 for our department when I got promoted to chief officer that you know, we were doing these things. So at that point, I became very heavily involved in policy development and technology as it relates to being a firefighter and our and doing our stuff. And, and from there, I was a division chief and operations for a short period of time, but our department had gone through a pretty difficult financial time after the financial crisis. And we actually took five or six years of pay cuts every year, which was devastating in the last 10 years of your career. And it greatly affected my retirement benefits now, as a result of that time and so after that, when I retired, I realized that and actually back in 2013 My brother was developing iasis microcurrent neurofeedback, which is tremendous technology that utilizes micro pulse energy to to help get someone out of fight or flight. And, you know, I'll talk a little bit about it, then I'll jump back to the career. But but in that time in 2013, I had actually lost a lieutenant in my command to suicide And he was an Army vet, he was a dear friend of mine. And, you know, when I lost him, I, it opened my eyes. Back in 2013, I began to, to look at mental health, how the mental health community treated first responders, how they looked at us as as a as a subgroup within the mental health treatment regimen. And, and what actually what are they doing? And because so many of us, I started hearing all these stories of so many firefighters falling through the cracks. And what do I mean by that falling through the cracks that they, you know, because of the trauma they suffered as a child or trauma from the military or trauma from a life as a first responder, all these traumas, cumulated, to putting these individuals in fight or flight to, to loading their bodies with, with all of these sympathetic neurotransmitters, which which by the way, this the key right there, it's, it's how do our bodies get affected by this trauma and, and is this is a technology that helps to reverse you know, that sympathetic freeze that we call it that that overabundance of sympathetic neurotransmitters that are going through your body. And I'll tell you, you when When this occurs, when you're living day to day in fight or flight, the reason our our folks are falling through the cracks, is because you went when you're suffering, and you have these high levels of cortisol and norepinephrine and

acetylcholine, you can't think clearly James, you, you know, I mean, obviously, there's a broad spectrum of how things affect you because you know, as they say, medicines, not an exact science, and everyone is affected by things differently. But as at the base core, when all of these sympathetic neurotransmitters are going through your body, like mad, you know, you, you can't think clearly you can't get up you're not making good decisions. So consequently, higher rates of divorce, higher rates of, of drug addiction, higher rates of suicide. So it ran the gamut. So you know, 2013 teen here I am a battalion chief on Miami Dade lost a lieutenant to suicide. And I'm pounding on the table saying what can we do? And I had roadblock after roadblock after roadblock, whether it was Fire Administration just not wanting to even address it. You know, back in the day, if you complain that you had some stress or post traumatic stress, and that's not we called it back in the day. But you know, you complain to someone and you know, they essentially told you that, you know, you, you know, you were not a strong individual, and there's a lot of expletives that were called individuals, because there was that lack of understanding, you know, there's so in the beginning of this whole mental health discussion, you know, 1012 years ago, you know, it was it was a bad word. And we were treated poorly by administration by, by senior officials outside the fire department who managed our budgets, and it became a tremendous uphill battle. So, I became an ISO certified provider in 2015, while I was a part of May 2013, while I was still a battalion chief and then I became an ISO certified trainer. And then I actually wrote the first or the second iteration of the lesson plans for iasis that teach, or pardon me, that taught professionals all over the country, how to utilize this equipment, and how to integrate it into their individual practices. And, and my experience and learning was teaching them what has today become part of the Mental Health dialogue, which is culture. And I'll get more into that later on. We go back to the kind of the fire department journey. So in 2015, I retired from Miami Dade and my wife and I opened to practice doing iasis microcredit neurofeedback, and we did that for about five years. While that was happening, I maintain my status with Miami Dade, I was actually the one of the first in the mentorship program for Miami Dade. And that program allowed me to stay involved. And that's an aspect of every fire department that I think we should take a look at as chief officers. How do we keep our retirees involved? Well, I think it's very important because you know, you go from a 30 plus year career running around with your hair on fire one day to turn in your keys and your security card or your bunker gear the next day. And you know, unless you have a plan, you know, you're all alone. And, and so, you know, that's, that's very difficult for a lot of people to handle. So, you know, I believed in that retiree program, and I taught classes I mentored Junior chiefs, and I really enjoyed that. But my wife and I really wanted to Try to see if we could make a difference with AI assists in the lives of first responders. Now to give you a little bit more background, my wife Jackie is a retired captain from Miami Dade. She did 30 years, actually one of the best firefighter paramedics I've ever had the privilege of serving with not just telling you this is not just because she's my wife, but just to Yeah, just a tremendous, and she's not here listening. So you know, it's not like I'm getting points, but just a tremendous woman, tremendous human being, who has just been a giver, and who taught me a lot, and reminded me a lot throughout the 20 plus years we've been together reminded me about why I'm in the fire service. And, and what what I bring to the table, you know. So we began to treat folks, and I'll tell you, we were pretty much treating pro bono. I mean, we were getting a small amount of money, because we had to pay for the equipment. But when we got into doing ISS, it wasn't, you know, we're retired at that time, we pardon me, we really, we weren't looking for money, we were looking to make a difference. And I felt if I could really learn how to do this, that I could bring something of meaning back to the fire service and give them a tool to with which could be in the tool bag to help our you know, our men and women. So literally treated, I mean, hundreds and hundreds of first responders with iasis 1000s of sessions, James, between my wife and I, and, you know, through that process, I really began to learn, it began to hit me.



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What began to hit me was the gaps where where our gaps are in mental health. And what began to hit me James was that, you know, this is on us, you know, we when the mental health community failed us, and I don't I don't mean to, I don't mean to throw daggers at the mental health community they're doing, they were doing the best they could with the tools they have. But the problem is, is it's no different than the medical community. It's no different than other communities where people are very proud. And as a firefighter with a lower level college education. If I question a PhD, oh, you can't do that, you know, so So you have to prove yourself, you have to show data, there's all these you know, everything is data subset. So how do you prove what you're doing is better than what the PhD folks are giving us? Well, my statement James, which is a statement I say all the time when it relates to mental health, when I've lectured at events, when what any chance I get to talk about mental health is if what the mental health community was doing and is doing was working, then we would not have the the massive amount of firefighter suicides that is not going down, it's going up. So if the number was going down, if the if the addiction rate was going down, if the divorce rate was going down, if if the numbers of firefighters who were forced out of the fire service, because they were seen as drug addicts, when really they suffered trauma. And instead of flushing these, these wonderful season people out the door, we embrace them, and we bring them back to the fold. And we get them the treatment they need because we've invested 1000s and 10s of 1000s of dollars monetarily but these are human beings. And so and so to me up James that became this mission of changing the face of mental health in the fire service. And that's when I began to say, Listen, I can do is this all day long. But I need to make a larger impact. So taking what I learned, I began to apply for Senior Chief positions in the fire service because I realized, with my credentials with my background with what I've brought to the table, I can change this, I can really make an impact. Well, I don't know if any of your listeners out there and listening land has ever tried to retire from one department and get a fire service senior management job somewhere. It's not easy change. And it's not easy because you get chiefs, they get into positions and God bless them. They know that they want their people around them. They and if the chief is lucky to get into one of these physicians, they surround themselves and bring their own people in. And consequently it becomes very difficult to get into these positions because there's so very few of them. And my wife was honestly getting sick and tired of me because I mean James I would apply for Assistant Chief Deputy Chief Fire Chief positions, I would get down to you know, it'd be 50 to 70 chiefs in these positions. I get down to the top three, and the fire chief would pick his buddy and listen I had no sour grapes. I you know it just It is what it is. It's just the nature of the fire service at the senior management level when individuals are not promoting from within. That's a whole nother topic, by the way, which we can discuss in terms of secession planning within fire services and leadership. But, you know, because I kind of got hired that way, but my thought process is not supportive of the way I actually got hired. So, but I was very blessed to have been hired by Boynton Beach Fire Rescue as the Deputy Fire Chief, back in 2020. And I'll tell you the reason why I got hired, they actually had an assistant chief of EMS position that was available and, and I applied for both the the Seminole Tribe fire chief and, and this assistant chief position at the same time, and I had promised my wife, I said, Sweetie, this will be it, this will be the last, this will be the last department so I try it, you know, if I'm not successful, maybe I'll try to, you know, write a book, I'll teach a class to the FDIC, I'll, I'll try to develop some other way to to bring these things out and to help others. And, and sure enough, I interviewed for the Seminole Tribe I didn't, I thought I did well on that, but I didn't apparently, and the interim chief there, who they brought back, a wonderful guy named Ray Carter. Ray brought me back as the deputy. But I'll tell you, it's funny because I interviewed for

the assistant chief position. And a week later, he calls me and says, You I know this is kind of weird, he says, But he says You knocked it out of the park. He goes, would you mind coming on board as our deputy chief and I, I laughed and I said, Yeah, twist my arm chief, you know, I'd be honored to come on as your deputy chief. And, and that really began in August of 2020. I was the deputy chief for about two years. And I was appointed, I was the interim fire chief for a short period of time. And then I was appointed by a year and a half ago as the fire chief for Boynton Beach Fire Rescue. So it's, it's it's been a tremendous journey getting to this point. And it's culminated almost 44 years of public service across a broad spectrum, which really gives me I think, a very unique perspective on public service on how on how trauma affects us throughout our lives and, and how we can change how we can change the game, you know, James, so that pretty much from childhood up until the time I got hired from Boynton is my journey. I mean, do you have any questions? You know, for me at this point.

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James Geering 32:42

I mean, there's there's so much to pull out from now, but I do want to get to, you know, the the work week so that we make sure we discuss that. And obviously, then we'll, we'll unpack some other topics as well. But I just want to underline, I refer to myself as a gypsy in the fire service only 14 years, but for career departments, and then, you know, a heartbeat volunteering, where I live now, until I realized that I was basically feeling like a paramedic ride along, not a firefighter anymore. But um, but yeah, so but it did give me a very unique perspective, and you get to see the fire service with a much wider lens and someone who maybe has been one, possibly two departments, and that's become their, their entire ecosystem that truth. So I think it is a very powerful perspective that you have not only rising through the ranks from firefighter through to Chief, but also numerous ones from, you know, one of the biggest fire departments in America to, you know, single double station departments to military departments. So, just a preface of our next conversation, like you said, 2424 in the Air Force, and I don't know if it was the case with you, but I know some of our Air Force firefighters, you know, the, the airport side shuts down. So, from what I've heard, some of them get to sleep at night. So it's a slightly different thing in those particular cases. However, you know, 2424 4848 and now obviously, 2448 or 4896, you know, you've seen and worked a lot of these shifts, so you actually have lived experience in this topic as well.

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34:15

Yeah, so I really, really have and, and it's interesting, because, you know, I would say, and I'm going to touch on a little bit because I really want to, I really want to give a kind of a primer of this part of this discussion, and it's, it's something that I'm in the process of developing, because I really want to begin to teach other chief officers how to do this and it isn't just a matter of how do I get my department 2472 How do I go from 2448 with let's say, three week, Kelly days, which is a 48 hour work week, down to a 42 hour work week, which is a you know, a 2472 with no Kelly Now when I first got out of, let's say, when I go back to my Lauderdale lakes days, so before Florida lakes, there was no such thing as a Cali day, by the way. When I got hired by Lauderdale lakes, I was working 2440, eights, but a 56 hour work week, meaning that we had a Kelly day, every six weeks. That was the introduction of Kelly days into the fire service, I suppose the 56 Hour Workweek, then, you know, you move into the the late 80s, early 90s, a lot of departments, the big hubbub was, you know, at all the expense from from folks outside, all your guys are costing us all this money, because now you want to go to 2448



in a three week holiday, which essentially every six shift you get five days off. Well, that was wonderful. That's a great schedule. But But again, you know, you compare different fire departments and say, Well, you know, some fire departments, like, you know, you go to, you know, Miami Dade, and you know, you have rescue trucks and fire trucks. I mean, I was a captain on a on a, you know, als engine, and Opa Locka. I fought 300 fires James and five years 300 fires, well, I guess that kind of experience in Chicago or New York or LA, right. So you know, not only do I have this fire, you know, this mental health experience, but I have a tremendous amount of tactical fire experience, which is one of the things that helped me get hired in Boynton as well. But you look at the schedule, this work week schedule, and you say to yourself, sleep deprivation, and we know this, right? And of course, all the science folks out there, and all the politicians and all the people holding the pencils and the money people behind the scenes, you know, everything's about data. Well, you know, sleep deprivation, I think, from my humble opinion, and, you know, again, I have no data in front of me, but I can tell you in 44 years of experience that pardon me that sleep deprivation is probably one of the worst things that we're doing to our people. And, you know, there's been a lot of talk that says, Okay, well, what do we do about it? Do we do we get firefighters off of 24 hours shifts, you know, forget these 2470 twos, let's, let's put firefighters on 10s and fourteens, like New York and Chicago tried. But I have to tell you, man, you work a 14 hour day, you know, in a row, you've worked like 210s, or you know, 210s and a 14. And, and you'd be you'd be more exhausted than you know, when you work 2448.

J

James Geering 37:30

Well, they also they've got to factor in that if it's a department with no Kelly, for example, you've got to make 10s and twelves work that add up to 56 hours, which no one is going to do because you'd have to work basically seven days a week. So this is the other thing when you when you break it down, even though it's the wrong thing for the fire service, it really reveals the ridiculous amount of hours that you're asking a firefighter to work because you couldn't make it work with 56. I mean, I'd literally be you know, 510s or to have 510s or some twelves and some 10s. Back to back for almost the whole week. So this suppose it dream schedule that we have is actually revealed to be far less than than the myth that we tell ourselves.

h

38:11

That's exactly right. But I'm gonna tell you that's what actually that's what that's where we need to go with this conversation. Now, I think because you just actually laid the groundwork right there. And the groundwork is the difference between what those individuals outside of Fire Service Administration, outside of the union's, let's say, the membership, the rank and file first, then you then your union leadership, then your fire service administration, then your city or municipality administration, then your elected officials. So in this food chain, right. So the whole idea here is that, you know, those people above us are real good at telling us what we need. And they're real good at telling us how to manage our own stuff. Well, I have to tell you, I go back to what I said earlier, it is up to us. It is up to us as fire service leaders. It is up to us as union leaders, it is up to us as rank and file to not just take the status quo. If our guys and gals, when they get on a fire are able to recognize that a particular appliance does not work to pump water at the right gallons and the right pressure. And I don't like this nozzle, but I know I can make it better. We're all MacGyver as James out there. So why shouldn't we apply that same mentality to improve our craft which all of us that give a crap about the fire service are all

about training and you know, they every day Train, train train because the more training you have, the safer you are, and your men and women go home at the end of their shift. That's that's what we do. We train, train train, but that same mentality we have to take and be very passionate about. And we have to question authority, we have to question our chief officers, we have to question those into individuals above us. Not in a negative way. But we have to challenge everyone to do the best they can. Because I'll tell you living a life of service and sacrificing your life for others. It's it's no easy task. And and there are a lot of people out there that say, Well, you know, you firefighters are too much money for what you do. And you know, you retire and you have a pension, oh, I didn't have a pension. And I say to those individuals, you don't have a post retirement death rate in the United States of a municipal firefighter who's done 30 years of six years, James, six year post retirement death rate, those numbers are terrible. In Miami Dade, that number is five years five year post retirement death rate. Well, why is that? And we're looking into those statistics, part of which is suicide, and part of which is mental health. But to boil it back to the schedule, how do we accomplish this? How do we put all this together? Well, it starts with relationships. Everything is about relationships. And it's the relationship that you have between your Fire Administration and your union. Your union represents the membership, your union represents the Bob, Fire Service Administration has to run the department, we have to be fiscally responsible, we have to be transparent, we have to have a high level of integrity, we have to prove to those individuals above us who are writing the checks for the things that we're doing, that we are putting our money where our mouth is, we are being fiscally responsible. But by the same token, we must take care of our people. Because if we don't put our people first, we can't take care of anybody else. We can't serve the public, if we don't serve ourselves first. And anybody that doesn't know this, or anybody that doesn't take this to heart is fooling themselves. So to begin the dialogue of mental health programs, you have to go back to the basis, which is a healthy and solid labor management relationship. Without it, you can't do anything, James, there's nothing you can do. Your union contracts will be horrendous. Your relationships with between management and and firefighters will be horrendous. You can't accomplish anything, you might as well just sit back and collect a paycheck. Because you're not going to make a difference in anybody's lives. That

 James Geering 42:38

may jump in that for a second because for 14 years, I've watched roomfuls of adults, union and city and or county, act like petulant children and make a simple contract negotiation process lasts one, two, sometimes three years. And we talk about inefficiency and waste of money. So with your perspective, how, how do we devolve to the point where grownups can make decisions amongst themselves that waste so much time and money in the fire service?

 43:12

I'm going to tell you, man, it's a primmer. It's like a roadmap, if what I've discovered and what and it's not just me, it isn't just me discovering this. A lot of other cheaters have wonderful chief officers around the world. There's some wonderful union leadership around the world. There's a lot of great relationships between a lot of these folks, and I'm not trying to paint a picture that you know that that's a problem. That's a major problem. But it is something that we need to look at first. That's the number one thing, how do we do that? We do that by helping to educate our chief officers helping to remind them where they came from. If I'm a chief officer and administration, I didn't get there. Because I was hired off the street with no

experience. You know, this isn't like FedEx. I say this all the time. What we do is not like FedEx and UPS, bro. You know, you have a bad day and the fire service is someone dies, you have a bad day and FedEx and UPS Oh, well, you know, I might get upset and go home and cry in my youth and my Wheaties, but nobody dies. So So my thing is, is trying to help remind everybody, why are we here? Are we here for self interest? Are we here because I just want to, I want to, you know, get as much off the you know, you know, let's go back and look at Eastern Airlines and Panem. If you look at why Eastern Airlines and Panem went out of business, and I've been saying this since I was a firefighter at the airport at Miami International Airport, and I was there when Eastern Airlines went out of business and pan-am. Well, why did they go out of business? It's because in the 1980s you had baggage handlers making 60 grand a year. Now listen, God bless their union. Their union was able to negotiate this but here's the problem. If you have a union membership, whose only whose only mantra in life is to get as much off of the off of the boob as you can. Let's suck it dry. There's nothing left for you. What I try to teach people is we need to be the Remora on the sharp James, metaphorically speaking, okay, we need to be the Remora, we need to hang out on the big entity. And we need to understand that we need to get little bits and pieces Rome wasn't built in a day, you need to get little bits and pieces and slowly but surely build upon each thing that we do to then wind up having good relationships, good union contracts, but it starts with labor management. And after Labor Management, I'm gonna I'm gonna move on. After labor management after you've solidified that relationship. You need to have leadership or division. And it isn't just your it isn't just your chief officers, if your union leadership doesn't have vision, and doesn't share the same vision as management, again, now you have a huge failure point. Because if union management wants one thing, and the fire chief and executive staff one another, you may still have a good relationship and a good contract. Everybody has to be on the same page. What is that page James? The page is our men and women deserve to be paid as much money as possible so that they can live a comfortable life so that they don't have to work a part time job, you don't have to work a 24 hour shift, running 20 calls, seeing the death and destruction that we see. Because let me tell you, from the mental health perspective, the heart can never undo what the eyes have seen. So for my people, I want my people to go home, take a nap, and then go to the beach, I don't want them to go to a part time job. I want them to be able to earn enough money so that they can have a home and have a nice life. That's the American dream. And we owe it to those men and women who sacrifice their lives for others to make sure they get paid appropriately. That's number one. Number two, is we have to be able to make sure that the fire department is running appropriately. How does that happen? Gia Do you have enough Manning? Or you know manpower people power on your units? Are you running to person engine companies, which is horrendous? Are you running three NFPA recommends for but not everybody can afford for Ahmed, I run an extremely progressive Fire Department. But right now I have to run three on an engine. And I run three on a rescue. So obviously we modify our response characteristics so that we have enough firefighters on fires when we need to. But the premise here is, is that we move forward together in unison creating a vision, that vision is how can we improve the life of our people, the equipment that they're using, the stations that they live in, we can't tolerate stations with mold, James, my wife was a product of a station with mold, wound up destroying her kidneys, and she had to have a kidney transplant. And she ended her career, you know, she was 30 years, she would have stayed longer. So so it's not just about, you know, one aspect. So but it goes beyond as as as once we have that relationship between union and management, once union and management have a collective vision to move the department forward in a positive way for growth for education, solidifying our position within the community. How do you do that? Well, you need to have a fire chief, we need to have some senior leadership that are savvy, you need to have individuals that aren't just collecting a paycheck. You have to realize that, you know, and I say this all the time. A fire chief is the cheerleader in charge. It is the fire chief's responsibility to be very politically connected, not only within the department

and within the union to help run and manage the department. But they have to be politically connected. What does that mean? It what it means is that we helped educate our senior city leadership, our Senior county leadership, our elected officials, we helped educate those individuals on the culture of first responders, both police and fire and and you help to educate them on what is the most important thing that their constituents want or need. This has taken this way beyond just the firehouse conversation. You want to change the game. You want to make a difference. It's No it's nothing different than any group has done in this country since the beginning of time. And I'm not talking about lobbying. I'm talking about bringing real data to the to the forefront. of bringing real information to the forefront and educating our leadership beyond Fire Service Administration on what is necessary. So that begins with strategic planning. If a fire department out there does not have a strategic planning model, they're doing themselves a disservice. And that strategic planning has to go not just within the fire service, but it has to be an accepted modality within the municipality. Because you have to set in order to set the budget for the upcoming year, you have that budget priorities? Well, where do your budget priorities come from? It In my particular case, your budget priorities come from your elected officials who drive the the bus, they drive the ship, they, the elected officials, through their constituency, determine the vision of the city or the municipality. My job is the fire chief is to help them realize that public safety should always and let me re emphasize this. Always be at the top of any strategic planning model. Now, could you consider that self serving to a degree it might be because I'm out there trying to protect the men and women who were served. But from a larger perspective. And in a strategic planning model and a model where we we look at budgeting and we look at what what is the what what is the key for government? What is that the government is there to do? Government is there to provide services, basic services for their constituency for their citizens. But what is the number one service that every single municipality can do that serves the best interest of their people? Well, we know you've got to pick up the garbage. So we know garbage is important. But what's more important than that, having do we want to have police officers? Do we want to have paramedics and firefighters do we want to be part of a modern civilized society that provides basic services for our community? Absolutely. But until you can educate and until you can help deer and guy, and don't let anybody out there and listening land think that they can't do this. Think well, I'm just a fire chief, how can I drive the bus in my city? Well, you can. And you can because you want to step up to the plate, and you want to be that guy or gal that steps up to the day I was at a commission meeting, and it was willing to stand up for what's right. And it's willing to stand up for the betterment of the community. Because at the end of the day, if I have healthy, rested, well fed, well paid first responders, I now know that I've got my people protected. I've got my people covered.

J

James Geering 52:45

Follow me. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. I think like you said as well with the mission, I worked 14 years. By far the the most mission driven department would have been Anaheim, California when I was there. But when I think about it, you know as as a, literally a firefighter and everyone promoted, I absolutely adored that position firefighter paramedic, there was never really where are we? Where do we want to be in five years? You know, what, what are we trying to impact? Is it opioid, you know, overdoses is it, house fires, you know, and obviously, there's a prevention side to that, but you, and I've heard this even in the military, that there's, there's a sense of, without without that, of just like, just show up, put your gear on the rig, and just run your calls and shut up. You know, and that's a very, you know, black and white observation, but it is I mean, I think, if you don't understand the bigger picture, you understand what it is that you and your incredible team of firefighters and prevention officers and paramedics are trying

to do, then you don't have that sense of, of purpose as much, you know, you just as you said, I mean, I had the same thing I was working in Super, you know, high op tempo stations. And it was, you know, run the code, clean your gear, clean up the back of the rig or the rescue, and then go run another one. And it was just this, this meat grinder. So I think by putting that purpose that pulls together, you know, the the officers it brings in the cities or the counties because we're trying to positively impact the negative cause that we run on and increase our performance on the cause that we respond to, you know, so there's a mission and it brand brings everyone together. But if it's just as you touched on before fighting over money, for example, it is completely removed from the very reason that we put the uniform on. And just to go back to the death toll, or the other the shortened lifespan, five, six years is what we hear over and over again, which is from what I understand 12 years younger than the average civilian. Well, one thing that's not really discussed is that those men and women that stood on the diamond on the grinder on day one, I would argue are probably some of the fittest and most mentally resilient people in that community. So arguably, their lifespan should actually be A way longer than the quote unquote, average. So we're probably snatching more years and we realize in our profession,



55:07

I agree with you. And again, now, it's great how this conversation has been kind of going and wheezing back and forth, because I think it's important that we stay fluid. And this is no different this conversation is no different than how I look at life, because we must be fluid. And if you go back, and you look at that, and you realize the impact of what you just said, you know, on that larger picture, you know, so I think, I think, you know, all of this is very difficult, you know, you, firefighters, a lot of firefighters don't want to go outside the door, a lot, a lot of you know, the culture, the fire service, because it's so hard. It's so hard to run that that call volume, and then and still have the mental capacity, and were with all to fight for yourself. And I don't mean that in a negative way. I don't mean fight and hype. What I mean is to advocate for yourself, you know, and that mentality is, you know, God, I just want to get back to the station and I just want to get in bed, you know, is that one o'clock yet? Is it nap time? I just need to get in bed because I'm exhausted. Because I have to have two part time jobs, because I'm not earning enough money. And you're right, firefighters are some of the most fit individuals on the planet. But what happens James is 30 years of sleep deprivation, followed by 30 years of of massive amounts of cortisol in your body. And how do I how do I feel? How do I get become normal? Well, how do I feel normal is the minute I get off duty, I pour myself a crown and coke. And now I get a little buzz. And I feel and I feel I think I feel normal. Well, what happened now I'm just going deeper down the rabbit hole. And and so it becomes this you move you go into the abyss? And how can you advocate yourself that you can add cockney advocate for others, if you can't even advocate for yourself, because you're so numb. So it takes leaders who have the wherewithal, and I'm saying that nicely, because there's another word I'd like to use that have the gumption to stand up for their men and women and to and to not just take status quo and to not just be the kind of administrator that, you know, listen, you can be the greatest administrator and you can try to create the best Fire Department, you can look at look at Bruna Seanie, and all the things he did and Phoenix and look at there's some wonderful example bowls of chief officers and administrators that have done wonderful things in the fire service. But we cannot stop. We cannot stop we have to continue to do what's right by our people. And so the next step in this process, after after the strategic planning after the vision after the collaboration after the communication, after all that is done. And listen, this is this takes a tremendous amount of energy. This isn't just something, you know, let me tell you when I went into Boynton and I brought this energy, and I brought this desire for labor management to

become one. Listen, I was looked at as people looked at me like I have horns growing out of my head, you want to do what you want to be you want to be in bed with labor. And I said I'm not in bed with anybody. I said the idea of something my wife haha. But I said the idea here is is that without having collaboration, without having without hitting unity, Remember the old saying, you know if you go back to the Art of War by Sun Tzu, you know, divide and conquer. If the goal of elected officials and senior leadership and some municipalities is our our unions are getting too powerful, we you know, those firefighters are so busy running calls, you know, we're just going to keep running them into the ground, so they don't have time to fight us so that I can take that million and a half dollars that I needed to go to 2472 and I can build another park. So that's that's what you're fighting for. You're fighting and competing for tax dollars, and where that revenue spent. Because remember, when you're a director of an organization as a fire chief, and as a Director of Emergency Services, I'm one director of a team within a municipality that runs almost a billion dollar but you know, not a billion pardon me several 100 million dollar budget. So if you just look at a municipalities budget as the whole, and obviously public safety, as we just discussed, should be from strategic planning perspective. And from a morality perspective, the number one concern of any constituency of any city of any municipality in the United States in the world should be public safe. But how do we achieve that right? You got to compete for these dollars. And let me tell you something as the fire chief standing up for the day is talking about how I need a new million and a half dollars. firetruck when, when someone else let's say it or someone in finance or someone in someone in facilities or utilities or the parks department is going, oh man, they got the sour grape. They're going, oh, man, these firemen, these cops and firemen, they get all the money. They get all the nice trucks. Well, but why is that? It's because it's the number and this is what I keep reminding people when I speak. If the number one concern of your citizens and constituency and elected officials is public safety, then obviously, that's where the majority of dollars has to be spent. And of course, I'm not. I'm not saying we spend them frivolously, because the other part of my job is to be extremely fiscally responsible. We have to prove not like Eastern Airlines, Eastern Airlines put themselves out of business because of their labor management not getting together and not having a vision. So we already talked about vision. We talked about labor management. We talked about strategic planning, we talked about how to begin to facilitate this move. The next step in all of this as a as a fire service administrator is you must know your budget. Let me tell you the difference between a small municipality and a large municipality, right. God bless my brothers and sisters in Dade County. I although now I'm back to wearing blue. You know, Gray was our uniform. I said for years that we bleed Gray, and green because of our lime green trucks that Miami Dade will always be in my heart. My wife retired there. I have two sons, who are firefighters. They're one on Air Rescue and one that just made lieutenant, I have another son who's a Florida Wildlife police officer. So we live public service, right? But But to be clear, and to be real. All right, I'm real with you, bro. So to be real. In a large organization, you have a secretary for a secretary for a secretary. And in my organization, I do 15 jobs. Every one of my chiefs does 15 jobs in a small organization, right? So I don't have a budget analyst. I don't have a budget. It's me as the fire chief. When I came in as the deputy, I realized the budget, the money is the key to everything in life, but especially the fire service. So when I became the deputy chief, I learned that if I don't know my budget, I cannot speak I cannot ask for a penny. I cannot move the needle unless I know what is that one of our expenses and what is our revenue. So knowing your budget is key, every chief officer every fire chief out there needs to know their budget backwards and forwards. You need to know how many masks you're buying. You need to know how many you know what I'm saying. So, I know some might think I'm crazy, because you look at Miami Dade Oh, come on. I don't need to know how many masks I'm by. But the bottom line is you need to know where your money is being spent. That's number one. Number two is that you need to know where your revenue is coming from.



1:03:08

There's nothing better that you can do besides doing community service outside the fire service, which we'll talk about also, because public image outside of the day to day is probably almost as important as doing well running calls. It really is our presence within the community. We have a tremendous opportunity and a built in a built in way of getting at the heartstrings of those in the community but but to go back to budget. So revenue is extremely important. One of the things I did when I got when I was the deputy is I realized we were spending a lot of money on clerical staff to process EMS billing for EMS transports. And of course, we were not we were not billing what we could have been billing. So some people out there might say Oh, well, you know, isn't it three? Why are you charging me for EMS transports? I already paid a fire fee. I already pay my taxes. You guys are nickel and diming me to death with my taxes? Well, you know, let me tell you something. If public service if if having good fire and police departments are your number one concern. You got to pay for it, James. I mean, it doesn't come out of thin air. So how do you pay for it? Well, you know, transport revenue is something that every fire department charges everywhere in the world. It's not free. We charge for transports. But are you charging adequately? Are you charging appropriately? Are you collecting the amount of money you should be collected? So I've saved my city a considerable amount of money by outsourcing and I'm not a fan of outsourcing everything. Don't get me wrong, but there are certain things that I feel and you have to do the budget analysis. Is it more cost effective? Are you You're gonna get more bang for your buck by by contracting an outside agency to to build for your EMS, transport revenue. And again, your fire prevention revenue. That's a whole nother stream. My Fire Prevention Bureau is self sustaining. The entire Bureau is paid for a by revenue from fire inspections and plans review. So, but to summarize, the budget portion of fire chief has to know their budget, you can't get up to the Dyess and you can't speak about mental health and spending money. You can't say, Well, you know, I want to move from an EAP model, which is covered under the insurance umbrella and under an insurance policy that the city's paying for whether they're self insured, or whether it's part of a health insurance plan. I'm going to stand at the Dyess and I'm going to say well, that's just some stocks. It doesn't work. It's broken. It's not serving my people. I want to I want to bring in a third service mental health provider, and it's going to cost X amount of dollars, bro, do you think they want to do that? You think anybody above a fire chief wants to do that? No, they don't. So you have to prove why the proof is in the statistics of us dying young. The proof is in the stress level that were put under and the sleep deprivation and the divorce and the addiction. And all of these things. Do we want our first responders to be comfortable and live good lives or not. And if we do, then then providing that level of mental health is another part of the puzzle. So knowing your numbers is very important.



James Geering 1:06:36

I want to jump in there again, just before we're on the numbers thing for you, for Barry, for me, for a lot of people listening, the fact that first responders are dying is enough. And I actually just went to Pensacola with IHMC room full of some of the greatest minds from the military from neuroscience, you name it. And it was interesting, because you know, the, you mentioned about branding, getting the community the myths that a lot of these people believe and I point this out even as a firefighter, we talk about, you know, one day is on to one day on two days off, and now we only work nine days a month, which is absolute bullshit. We work three hour days crammed together to work three days on one day off, or 30 days a month is actually the

reality on a 56 hour work week before mandatories. But we tell ourselves this myth and then other people believes this myth. And then the citizens think that we sit around to this day 2023 That we sit around waiting for fires and why is there a fire station fire engine on my EMS call? But the myth as well, I think is as you touched on all they want more people. Now, that to me as someone who is not in business whatsoever, but did an economics class when I was in community college as a term false economy. And, you know, we mentioned Bruna Seanie, some people look at the fire service as a business. And I always say okay, well then let's model virgin or Google, not an Indonesian sweatshop. You know, you look at the corporate space, they're understanding the wellness of their employees is imperative. And they're bringing even the civilian workweek down finding they're being just as, as efficient, just as productive and they get extra time off to spend with their families. So when you were looking at the money, obviously, we're going to get into the storytelling. I know that's an important piece. And also, you know, the image I just learned from this conversation. If other departments are moving to better work schedules, and you already have a hiring crisis, newsflash, you're not gonna get even worse. But from the budget analysis point of view, what were you seeing as far as the cost of the ill health of first responders medical retirement workman's comp, overtime, covering spaces, lawsuits, from mistakes, etc?



1:08:51

Well, I gotta tell you, that is a brilliant, a brilliant point. And it's so interesting, because man, you know, we, as we just sat here, we've been here a little over an hour, you know, we've touched already on a plethora of topics, but, but that's what's interesting about this, there's so much behind the scenes, you can't just stand up and go, Oh, you know, let's talk about firefighter mental health. I mean, as you know, we've only had snippets of this conversation. We're gonna get into the mental health topic in a minute. But think about what you're saying. All of this stuff in the background, all of this stuff. So as we as we aspire This is What's brilliant about this dialogue. As we aspire to improve the mental health of our men and women who serve. We are going to produce higher level of service fire departments. We are going to produce more fiscally responsible fire departments. We're going to produce more collaborative fire departments. We're going to produce better leaders. We're going to improve the fire service as a whole. That's why people look at it and got mental health for firefighters. Let's just get a more therapist. The topic is so Deep and and and it means so much. But you kind of also hit the nail on another head. We had Boynton we're dealing with the situation now if you look at at Palm Beach County, for example, the number of fire departments and there's 15 or so fire departments, so Palm Beach County is a large entity 50 Something fire stations, not quite as big as Dade County, but they're a great organization. And, and their mission is to handle all the unincorporated areas and handle any fire department or any municipality that doesn't want to run their own fire department. The problem is, unfortunately, what we're seeing in Florida is larger municipalities, larger fire departments, statutorily are required to charge an MST you tax rate. So when you look at larger municipalities, they're costing a lot more money. And that's not to say the smaller municipalities aren't providing a better service or good service. It's just that if you look at it, some of these fire departments are costing huge amounts of money. And they're still not providing, you know, the the right amount of people on the units the right you know, it's it's not the Palm Beach County snap, they're doing a great job. I'm just saying that. When you look at it, a lot of the smaller departments, either they lack the funding, or the resources, so being absorbed by the county is going to cost taxpayers even more money. So that's one of the things that I kind of brought to my elected officials and my senior staff leadership as well as my union membership. You know, Listen, guys, if if you want to wind up getting absorbed by the county, then first of all, labor and management need to be joined at



the hip. Because if we keep if we keep fighting and arguing, not that we were I'm just generalizing. If we keep fighting and arguing, we're going to wind up losing everything. What we need to do is we need to do a complete 180. And we need to make Boynton Beach Fire Rescue a destination Fire Department. Right now, if you have a conversation with any of my elected officials, my elected officials will tell you with pride on the day us at a public meeting, they will tell you, we have helped build a destination fire department that we are proud of. And they are concerned with mental health. They are concerned but why are they concerned? They didn't even know about it, they might have known a little bit about it. But we educated them, we brought it to the forefront. So in order for us to build a destination Fire Department, while we're trying to have enough money to buy trucks, and to just staff the department with 2448 and an era where let me tell you, statistics are not on our side right now with respect to being in public service. I'm very as a member of the Palm Beach County Fire Chiefs Association. Two members of our association, one of which is Palm Beach State College, which runs the Fire Academy are one of the academies and and the and the EMS arm of Palm Beach State, the director of Palm Beach State CMS who actually is a retired lieutenant from Boynton. And another gentleman who runs the fire academy who was a retired Chief from Pembroke Pines. These guys show up and every one of our fire chief meet us and we dialogue because having a good relationship with the colleges and training institutions is a very important piece of this puzzle Minister fire chiefs. It's our responsibility on a larger scale to keep all this together. Right. But from the statistics that the universities and the institutions are bringing to the fire chiefs, we are having a dramatic reduction in the United States in the number of individuals who want to go and become public servants. Let me let me let me make a comment here. Who who wants to in the height of COVID. Before we realized it was pretty much just a frickin common flu. You know who in the air of COVID wants to get dressed up in a level one hazmat suit 20 times a day? Worry about bringing something home that's going to kill my family who wants to go do that? James? No, more

 James Geering 1:14:13

than a year later be terminated for vaccine mandates.

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Oh, forget about that. That's a whole nother thing we can talk about. But but but the bottom line is, is that to answer your comment, and your question is the fact that in an era where fewer people are moving into public service, the need does not go away, right? We're trying to increase Manning on units, but we can't increase Manning on units because we don't even have we weren't even fully staffed. And then what happens when you're not fully staffed, when you're not fully staffed? Now your overtime budget goes through the roof. And now as a as an administrator, I get pressure from senior city leadership. And again, this this this does not occur. I'm generalizing. You know for me, I was on top of this from the beginning. And I laid a path and a ground work for my municipality that my senior leadership didn't have to make, you know, they didn't have to come to me, I went to them. And I said, this overtime has to stop. Well, how do you stop the overtime? You got to hire people? Well, how do you hire people, you have to have good benefits, good pay, and you have to you have to have a good mental health program. And you have to commit to taking care of your people for 30 years. They don't just come in and work for you. I mean, let me tell you something as a chief on this department, my mantras since 2005, when I got promoted the chief officer with 25 years in the fire service was I

don't you guys, I work for you. You don't work for me. Right? That's, that's the mentality. You know, as the chief officer, I work for the membership. I'm not, I'm not a king on the Hill. I'm the guy just trying to put it all together and make it function, right. So I brought these concerns and problems to senior leadership. But I didn't just bring them up problems is big in the fire service, don't bring me problems, bring me solutions. I use the data, I use the analysis of the Kelly de liability. I'm going to tell you, there's a guy out there, I love him to death. His name is Jim stables. He was our fire chief for a short period of time, he was our interim city manager for a time and went back to his family in Tennessee. When Jim when I was a deputy, and Jim came in for a small period of time, Jim brought to us, Jim was big on data and brought a spreadsheet that he had developed, which helps and we maintain it to this day, and it's something that I would highly recommend every fire department do if they don't. And we do daily tracking. And when I mean daily tracking? I mean, we every single hour of leave that's used we track, what kind of leave? Where was it? Is it sick leave? Is it PTO time is it vacation time, holiday time? How many people do we have off how much overtime is created, you have to know your numbers in your data. That's, that's, that's important. So after budget, you know your numbers in your data. The next thing is once you know your numbers in your data, in order to change the game in order to turn your fire department into a destination department. And in order to get the numbers of people you need. Your salaries have to be competitive. And you can't even begin to think about going if you have two people on an engine company. Boy, you can't even think about going to 2472 Because you're barely able to serve your community. So you have to have at least three people on an engine company and three people out to rescue. Once Once you're servicing your community properly, and you have the right number of personnel, now you can begin to tackle those job benefits. Because if you go to 2472, you need to hire more people. So for us, statistically, we looked at the Kelly day, right? If you look at the number of hours, you're looking at your leave liability, statistically, in data analysis, the Kelley day is your largest lead liability because think about this in a 42 hour work week, where you have a three week Kelly day, you know, you have you know, every sixth shift, you know, you have a certain number of people that are off and you're having to backfill. Now, if you don't have a sufficient number of people in relief, forget, forget about even having that if you don't even have if you don't even have fully staffed, let alone having relief people. It's a recipe for disaster, your overtime budget is going to go through the roof. So going back for a sec. Number one, we need to make sure that we're increasing revenue everywhere we can we prove to our people above us that we are concerned about that. We make sure that when we purchase purchasing is extremely important. As the fire chief, I ensure that when we purchase an item, not only do we follow federal and city procurement regulations, dude, I take it way beyond that. I hold every vendor to task, we get the best prices on every single thing we can buy. And I don't mean, because we're getting the best price. We're getting the crappiest stuff. My guy said probably the best bunker gear in the business. We have top of the line equipment. And we get top of the line equipment, because we're fiscally responsible with how we manage that money and how we purchase. So those are a couple of important things. So I hope I answered your question because the bottom line is the administrators out there need to have a mindset of transforming their departments into destination departments, or they're going to get absorbed by the counties and they're never going to be able to serve their their constituency appropriately. Yeah,

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James Geering 1:19:53

no, I mean, you did and I'll throw a couple of things in that. It was again, it was interesting being in this room of very small people. From the non fire group, one thing that kept coming up because this is a group of scientists predominantly, oh, well, you know, do you have data? And I

was like, let me just let me just explain what you're asking. Do I have data that shows that a 56 hour work week where firefighters are awake for 24 hours every third day is more detrimental than a 42 hour work week, where they get an extra 24 hour period between each shift you're asking me do it is there's a phrase, you know, don't don't wait for science to prove what you already know. You know, that's, that's where you have to draw a line between science and common sense. But then from the fire side, I've heard a lot Oh, well, how are we supposed to get an extra shift? We can barely get enough people now. And my answer is very, very clear. I came into the fire service roughly when you had 25 years on already. So I came on in Oh, 304. And back then, you know, I didn't even come from a fire service family. I came from a different country. And so I kind of learned about the job as we went along. Realize I still absolutely adored it. But there was no discussion on sleep deprivation, mental health, why why we physically get hurt so much. I mean, all these these elements, the impact on the relationships, zero. Now fast forward, as you said, on top of the fact that we just had a pandemic, to a generation that has got fatter and sicker. And I mean that and you know empathetically, something that we need to change. But our pool of young men and women that are physically and mentally capable to do the job has got smaller. But the biggest thing is that now they can go online. And I guarantee you if you go on Google and you punch in like firefighter, sadly, one of the first things that probably pops up is suicide. You know, okay, well, then let me find out about the world, we oh, well, it's 56 hours a week. And by the way, 730, you may well get a phone call saying you have to stay for another 24 Doesn't matter if it's Christmas, or your child's birthday. Tough shit. So what I think people don't understand is just like you alluded to, if you create a great work environment, you know, and you actually support financially, these men and women, so they don't have to do another job. And if they want to beautiful, but then we educate them, don't take a night shift and er ding dong, go hang drywall for eight hours. If you want your lifted truck, that's fine. If you want to go above and beyond, then understand what is a good part time job and what is a bad part time job. But if you are researching a position, you mentioned UPS and FedEx, all right, I want to I want to be physically active, I want to get out out and about in town every day. And you know, I want to serve. Okay, I'm looking at the fire service. Oh, god, that's the salary for that many hours. Oh, and then there's mental health and you know, obesity and marriage problems. And again, that's a doom and gloom. But I mean, those are realities, or Oh, UPS is hiring 40 hours a week, get to sleep in my own bed every day, actually pays more, you know, the people that are in the middle of gonna go well, I really want to be a firefighter, but I can't afford it mentally and financially. So I'm gonna go drive a UPS truck instead. So what we have to do is educate the public on what we really do, change the workweek. So it causes, you know, creates an environment for our men and women to thrive. Because think about the experience that we lose through people walking away from the job getting her mental health problems, suicide, etc. We're losing a lot of experience as well. And so there's a lot of these bigger departments, you know, 50% department has five years or less on, that's not who I really want responding to my kid, you know, I'd love to have a crew that's diverse and newer people, but also, you know, engineer captain or senior firefighter that's got 20 plus years, that would be amazing. So, this is the kind of, you know, again, the myth is that we've been asked to do more with less, to the point where we are at a critical mass now, and a department that understands the value of providing a service for their community, and also the well being of their firefighters is gonna understand we don't have a choice. Now we have to change these things. Because if we don't know that departments around us do, no one is gonna want to work for you anymore. So the way that we create more people lining up and then mentorship program is another huge one I love the fact that you brought in the retirees for that is that we have to get people excited about this profession. But we have to actually realize that these first responders need more rest and recovery between their shifts, and their salary has to match what they do. Were a jack of all trades, master of none, you call 911 and it doesn't involve arresting someone. We're firefighter paramedics. And

that diverse skill set you think is only like locally here, firefighter EMT was on \$9.30 Something cents when I first moved here, an hour. It's you know, you reap what you sow and this is at the point now where you either are going to positively change your department and Save, you'll sit your county? Well, your name is going to be attached to the demise of it.



1:25:05

That's right. That's right. And I'm telling you something, you know, actually, part of the question you had asked me earlier as well about, you know, the destination fire department and doing all this and what we got to on this dialogue. Part of this was, and I'm gonna tell you SAMSA, I don't know if you've heard of SAMSA. But SAMSA is a federal group. It's the it's the Mental Health Services Administration. And SAMSA actually has done because I know you're very interested in data. And data is very important. SAMSA actually did some data analysis on and I actually brought this data to a to a lecture that I gave one time about trying to incorporate ancillary technologies into mental health programs. And when we dive into the mental health aspect here in a minute, because I think we're, we're close to really diving into that. But but as we transition into that, what I think is important is that the there there is data out there that supports the fact that if you look, and I looked at this data as it related to Miami Dade years ago, that if and Miami Dade has a Health Trust. So I mean, obviously there's a fiduciary and HIPAA, so they wouldn't give me this data. But what I went and looked at was the stamps to data. And, and I and and I looked at the SAMSA data, which basically looked at subgroups of the general population, and compared it to first responders in terms of in terms of how many first responders are taking anti anxiety medications, how many first responders are taking antidepressants, or SSRIs. How many first responders take sleeping pills to night to sleep. So, if you look at the data that way, you now can extrapolate Well, holy moly, if I have if the general population says seven to 8% of the general population takes takes anti anxiety medications, but 26% of the fire service somewhere in that area. Don't shoot me if the numbers wrong listening world. But somewhere in that 25 to 30% in the fire service takes antidepressants, SSRIs sleeping those three times the general population. Well, what does that mean? James, that means that three times the amount of people so if you have 100 people, and I use Dade County numbers, if died if Miami Dade has 2500 firefighters, and you say that 20% Even back the number to 20. If you say 20% based on SAMSA, statistics, and SAMSA stata in the fire service community is on antidepressants. That's 500 people, James, that's 500 People in Dade County Fire Rescue that could potentially be taking antidepressants. Now, again, I don't know if that number is accurate. But the bottom line is you can use that data as a subset to any number. You know, in my department, I have 160 on the line, I have 175 Total positions. So could I say out of my 160 frontline people, can I say the 24 of 25 of them are on depressants, I don't know, under HIPAA. I don't see these statistics. But the point I'm bringing out to you, bro is that that cost money. Every time a firefighter goes to see a doctor and gets a prescription for an antidepressant. Number one, if I have 500 or 400 or 300 and I'm Dade County size, and I have that many people that are on antidepressants, how much do you think that's costing the Health Trust?



James Geering 1:28:58

premiums. I mean, this is the thing, the more workman's comp claims the more firefighters that use an insurance policy that they're given us for that fiscal year. That you know, the higher the premiums are more it's costing the department as well. So the healthier department, the lower

the health budget needs to be. That's



1:29:15

right and then not even taking into consideration sick leave abuse. You know, you look into this, you know, guys that are rested, take a day off because they call it dialing a Kelly day because they want a day off and they've earned it and they deserve it right. But when you call out sick, that's something in the fire service that we and I'll tell you as an administrator, I don't I don't like using sick route to me. It's it lacks integrity and honesty and it's I don't want to use my sick leave to just because I need an r&r day. But But But honestly, there's nothing wrong with it. You know, if I'm not given the right amount of pay and I'm not given the right amount of benefits and I need a day off. I'm going to take but but that day off translates to expenses for the municipality. It creates a higher fire department and budget. So how many of the people that are calling out sick are calling out sick because they didn't sleep well last night? Because they drank too much because they have trauma. And because then they go to the community mental health community, and they're failing us. So, you know, I think as we transition into the discussion of mental health, I think it is extremely important that we begin to really, I think we need some, you know, there's a lot of smart people in the fire service. And I think a lot of us are some of us, I don't have the time to do this. But some of us need to dive into the actual cost, extrapolate the cost of sick leave abuse of the cost of these medications. And the larger costs, I'm going to tell you is probably 10 times the cost of, of, you know, funding a 2472, or funding of good, good proper salaries for your first responders. So I think, you know, I think if we show the powers that be that data, it would be a no brainer, you know, what I mean? Ya



James Geering 1:31:00

know, and again, it's false economy, you know, it's, it's having the courage to not look good that budget year. But as the saying goes, and I always push to the phrase, but you know, planting, planting the tree under the shade of which you'll never know, you know, doing it for the betterment of your department, the betterment of the service, the baton for the men and women and their families who are left for 24 hours at a time. So we can go protect complete strangers, that we take care of them as well. So I want to get to the discussions that you have with your city and how we were able to make that happen. But let's get to mental health. So So kind of expand on your perspective on that. And then and then we'll kind of lead through to how how you Boynton Beach, were actually able to make the shift from 2448 to 2472. So



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I'm going to tell you this is this is very, very, very important, right. And what I'm going to premise this, this part of our dialogue with is that I'm very blessed. And on so many levels. I can't tell you, James. But I'm blessed. Because when I draw and when I bring these things to the table, I'm blessed because number one, I have an elected body. And I'm now I'm into my second elected body since I've been with voting to some degree, some there's been some change of our elected officials. But I will tell you, that the support that I've received in my city, it isn't just going to be fire department that's progressive. And I have to tell you, I've been doing this as you know, I've said it several times already January starts 44. And and and again, this has nothing against my Miami Dade brothers and sisters, but I will tell you, I have never

been as fulfilled in the fire service as I am in my current position. And that that's a lot. There's a lot to be said for that. And why is that? It's that way because I've been able to utilize my experience, utilize who I am and what I bring to the table. I become a trusted member of executive leadership within the city. And in my city believes in me, they believe in our department, they believe in what we're doing. And they believe and making sure that public safety is their number one concern. So so in that respect, you know from city leadership, and I'll tell you, I'm my current city manager Dan Duggar. God bless this guy. You know, he was a police captain who worked his way up to be the city manager. I mean, what better individual can you have? You know, as a city manager or a county manager and Miami Dade, we had a county manager that was a fire chief, I mean, that one didn't go so well. But, you know, in my case, I have an individual at the helm of my city, who's my boss, who is very concerned about the mental health of his first responders, both police and fire. At the same time, he's he's concerned about, you know, fiscal responsibility and transparency. So the fact that I've been able to bring that to the table has allowed me great latitude. I have a tremendous amount of latitude to run my department and to to work on mental health initiatives that that not only benefit Boynton Beach, because my initiatives and our initiatives and the initiatives that have been brought together to a combination, it's not just me it's a it's a it's a larger perspective. I just put it together. It isn't just about fire. Our mental health program managers, our police department as well. And zoom portions of our mental health program are going to be rolled out to city why? Because because they work James. So I have to give this today It was I have to give this accolade you know, to my elected officials in the city to my city executive staff. Because one they believe in me they believe in. And what we do, they love the fire department, they love their police department. And they do so because we take it to the next level we we serve with honor and pride. And we just don't say it, we mean. And that's, that's what that's what's going to help anyone. So when you asked me start to tell me how that's number one. That's number two, actually, number one is, again, going back to labor management, because you can't do shit unless you have solid labor management. But number two, is making sure that that as a fire chief, you must have solid relationships with your city or your municipality senior leadership. And you must have solid relationships with your elected officials. And I will tell you, my friend, that takes an enormous amount of energy. And, and I'm not a young man, you know, I'm not in my 30s anymore in my 40s anymore, I'm going to be 62 in April. And I'm still chugging along in the fire service because it's what I do, I'll probably be one of those guys that dies with a badge on and that's okay. It isn't because I have nothing better to do. Because trust me, I don't really need this job. I do this job because I wanted to make a difference. And so as we transition into this discussion, I kind of go back to 2013 where I said to you that I lost that Lieutenant and I vowed that I was going to make a difference some house some way. And and I thought that you know I thought berries technology I thought I assist microcurrent neurofeedback, you know was going to be it. But what I realized in the larger picture that listen, phenomenal technology, I can't speak enough about it. I can tell you story after story after story after story. Anyone out there that Googles My name can actually see videos and testimonials of actual first responders that we treated from 2015 to 2000. And about 22. When I left to go back to the fire service, my wife maintained the practice until she became ill. And we had a couple other firefighters that were doing our neurofeedback. But it just became a became too intensive for us to maintain the practice. But But the bottom line is, is that the technology works. And and I realized that for me, and my experience, I want to change the game in that larger way. So so how do I do that? So bringing everything, everything together that we've just talked about for about the last hour and a half. All those things we spoke about is what I put together to bring forward now, again, I must say I was the deputy chief at the time, when we actually went to 24/7 etoos. Of course, I was extremely instrumental in the budget, I managed the budget, I managed everything behind the scenes, I was the one that, you know, put forth the numbers now the numbers changed a little bit that were reported, you

know, to our elected officials, in terms of the actual cost, the actual cost was a little higher than initially anticipated to make the move. Because when you when you talk about going to 24/7 and putting a third or fourth shift on James, you need to consider so many factors. It isn't just about hiring more people. And of course, you don't have to hire a whole shift. Because if you look at the Kelly day leave liability, you can say well, I have six firefighters in my department, let's say we had five or six firefighters off every single shift every day to allow for the Kelly they leave liability. So we didn't need our minimum Manning was 35 or 36 people per day, small department, five fire stations, you know, to two trucks per station. You know, so when you look at our department, you know, it's kind of you know, every department is different. So if someone listening to this says Oh, well I need to follow a point. What you need to do is you need to follow the primer to get you to where you are. The numbers are particular to every organization

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James Geering 1:39:24

just to jump in because I know devil's advocate people Yeah, well that's easy because you already had Kelly days. Well I know from Anaheim and Orange County, Florida. We were 56 No county zero Cali 56 hour week but to offset the insanity of that work schedule. Like Orange County. I think when I left I had 16 vacation days or you know, school vacation combined, sick combined, whatever it was, but there were days that even a department with no Kelly can use to negotiate against so you lose some of those days in lieu of obviously a much better After work week, therefore not needing it. So even a department with zero calorie days, I would argue that your offset you're kind of offering to the city, the county in lieu of this will be a sum of those vacation and or sick days that you know, now won't be needed because you're getting an extra 24 between the shifts. Right? Well,

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I will, I will tell you now, this is a very Union response. Okay. So all your union presidents out there and union folks are going to applaud what I say because because again, I'm always concerned about my people. But I'm also fiscally responsible. And I understand that some departments may not be able to afford it. And I understand that some unions may need to give concessions, somehow, some way, whether it would be, you know, initially, foregoing pay raises giving up some vacation days, you know, there has to be given tape, you know, this goes back to the Eastern Airlines discussion, you can't go back and you can't say, well give me give me give me, I want it all and not give anything up in return, it doesn't work that way, you can't go into a business negotiation. Note, there's not one business leader in this country, that goes into a one sided business discussion and comes out, you know, feeling as though number one, they've made a difference, or number two, that that dialogue or that business meeting is going to bear any fruit. So, you know, unfortunately, guys and gals out there that are the union folks, you're gonna have to give something up in those positions, because, you know, the municipality just is not going to be able to afford it. You know, now those individuals that have six week Cali days that are on a 52 hour work week, and those that are in my case, we were on a 48 hour work week with a three week Kelly day, obviously, those are a little easier from a fiscal standpoint. But again, I boil back down to what is the number one concern of that municipality. If public safety is the number one concern, then the chief has to paint the picture, that this is how much it's going to cost, you have a choice, you can continue to do the status quo. And in five or 10 years wind up having no fire department, or you can appropriately fund

your department. And you can have a world class department that you can be proud of that does your to show this. And I say that on the desk all the time, you have two choices. Either you fund us or you don't, it's up to you. But you can't fund this half ass because the half assed funding, you can look at 80% of the fire departments in the country, and realize that 80% of those fire departments that are poorly funded, they're not functional, James, it's not good for the citizens. It's not good for the firefighters. And so, you know, this dysfunctionality comes from from a lack of desire to properly fund your services. And if you have to tax your residents more, well, well, you got to tax your residents more, you have to pay for the services. Listen, the Roman Empire didn't last for 1000 years, because it gave services for free. The Roman Empire was able to function because it taxed its constituents. That doesn't mean we overtaxed because I hate taxes. But it means you have to pay tax in order to have public services. Where does the money come from?

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James Geering 1:43:16

Yeah, I want I want to just put another thing that I the knee jerk response to the 2472 that I got. Oh, so we're supposed to have a pay cut? No, your salary stays the same. It's like when you go two days, you are working a 42 hour work week on paper per hour, your hourly rate will actually go up. But for the cost for that individual for the year, the salary would stay the same. So just want to throw that in like that's, that's something I get to oh, we're just going to lose those hours of pay. No, that's not the discussion. In fact, the the polar opposite, as you touched on, a lot of firefighters are underpaid. So then you'd start pushing towards getting the pay where it needs to be as well.

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That's right. That's right. But again, I have to be honest with you, again, in this dialogue with my honey in this dialogue with mental health. You know what, what you have to keep in mind is again, you have to have a functioning Fire Department. Before you can expand. Just just a month ago, I sat at the Dyess and a conversation about strategic planning on a larger city perspective and utilizing funds for things that we needed, right? You cannot build anything on a shaky house of cards, you can never go to 2472 if number one you don't have, if you don't have a fully staffed or close to a fully staffed department, you can't go to 2472 because you got to hire more people. And if you can't even staff your fire department to the minimum now, you're never going to staff it with going to 2472 But you're absolutely correct. The hourly rate does go up now here's where it becomes a little more costly. Is is an overtime. So if you're if you're a department that doesn't have that you're not fully staffed, and you decide you know what I'm going to do do this anyway, I'm gonna go to 2472. And you can do what you want, you want to go to 2472 Go for it. But understand that when that hourly rate increases, because the hour of the workweek decreases, that means that when I work overtime, I'm paid at a higher hourly rate. So they are actually making a little more money, you know, when they work overtime, but again, that shouldn't be a negative. That's a positive. But again, there has to be given tape, you know, you again, remind everybody, you're you have to be the Remora. You can't be Listen, hogs are led to slaughter, right? Pigs are allowed to live and thrive. So in this community, we want what we want for our people, but we can't ask for too much that were pushed to the side, and minimized as a group. So that's, that's important for people to understand. Yeah,



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James Geering 1:45:56

just just to jump in as well, with with the if you can't stop now, I think and please, you know, correct me if I if I'm in lala land, but the way I see it, if a department says in their recruitment, we are going to be going to the 24 hour, sorry, 2472 schedule in 12 months, that then is going to attract more recruits. So I think that this is the problem. If nothing changes, of course, you're gonna have the same deficit that you have now. But if you start advertising that we are pushing, and we are hiring for this change, you won't see it immediately. But 12 months from now, when we've when we've hired the amount of people and we've promoted the amount of people that we need, we are then going to be switching to this. So I think that is what's going to lead people and inspire people back into your department, because you can't just click your fingers overnight and have, you know, two thirds of a shift suddenly show up in uniform. But you can certainly attract people with this onramp that is leading to the 2472

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Absolutely, absolutely. And listen, even if even if salaries are a little low for some of these smaller departments out there, you know, you could still go to 2472 be a smaller department have lower salaries and be that as your destination kind of attractor for individuals you can but again, understand that the the least amount that a department enjoys in terms of benefits, conversely, relates to a higher dollar cost to initiate. So if you have a department's on a 56 hour work week, but no Kelly days and you get to 2472, and you're understaffed, you're gonna have a pretty hefty, initial buy in cost. Because you don't have that Kelly de liability, you might have the sick leave liability, which you know, sick leave will go down. But then again, if you talk to Boca Raton Fire Rescue who actually was the first department in the United States to go to 2472 Boca Raton will tell you who's had 2472 for 20 something years, that now they don't, they don't really see much of a difference that people are still using sick leave back up to the level they were 20 years ago. Now. I'm not certain if that statistic would remain because a lot of people fighting for it go oh, if you have a reduction in sick leave. And at BOYNTON We have seen that. So initially, a municipality or department will see a reduction in sick leave, but over a five to 10 year period. You know you'll see it slowly statistically. Pardon me kind of creeping back up you know, but you will see sales

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James Geering 1:48:38

I love the way that Anaheim did it where they just caught it paid leave and I included your second vacation. So took away the stigma of a vacay you know of what the day off was labeled. So you know, if you use days for vacation, then fair enough and if you just literally wanted a mental health day, you know, a rest day a day with your child and they had they use tele staff and they were really really efficient at staffing and they were fully fully staffed. So overtime was few and far between once they finally got it when I was hired, they weren't they were in a deficit. And we were doing 7224 It was brutal. But um, but once they got stabilized it was fantastic because there wasn't that Hello chief bullshit that we have to do it was I'm a big boy. I'm gonna take a paid leave you know and usually what would happen then is people would anticipate it and so you would have the time to staff properly it wouldn't be screw someone at you know 730 In the morning unless it was a legitimate sick day. But you know, you took away that that kind of really that you're asking your people to be dishonest because of this broken system. So now it's like you have time off you can use it when you're ill you can use it take

trips, you know you don't go below this amount because you know what if you are ill but I love that system because now you know it's a lot more Understand, usually people can project you know, well, this has been a brutal shift, I'm going to take that shift off, I'm gonna let you now that, you know now 48 hours ahead, so you've got two full days to figure out the staffing. I just thought that was a great one. I haven't seen it since. But I really like that system. Well,



1:50:14

it's a great idea. And a lot of departments are going to call it PTO time. And basically, they you know, they get rid of sick leave vacation time and all that and they just use one leave time and, and whatever. But again, you brought up another point, part of this data analysis. And Miami Dade does a very good job of this, we're just starting to do it. But again, it's costly to to use relief factor. So actually, relief factor means that I'm going to utilize leave data in each rank. So I'm going to look at over a year period of time, I'm going to use the data to say how many firefighters how many drivers how many lieutenants captains, chief officers called out sick, how many use vacation time How many use holiday leave? How many are on family leave? How many are out on injury, and you use these numbers to extrapolate a relief factor in each rank position. And then between union and management, you negotiate promotions, based on relief factor? Because I don't, you know, I don't buy into this argument. And there are a lot of people out there. And I, you know, it's one thing a lot of chiefs and I don't agree with where they'll say it's cheaper to maintain overtime than it is to have an employee. And I'll tell you, that's bullshit. Because, again, you know, you're you're affecting mental health at the end of the day, and there's no cost you can associate to mental health. So, you know, but But to answer the question, yeah, I think it's important that we, we come up with some other form of leave, that's not as oppressive, and we allow our people, you have a relief factor in place that hires the right amount of people for the amount of leave that's being used, so that we don't go into mandatory overtime. There's nothing worse than having to mandate people for overtime. And and, and so when the city came to me and says, Well, how do you get rid of all this overtime? Well, you need to hire more people. And even in even in our plan for 2472, we actually have 40 lieutenants, we have, you know, we have five stations, over four shifts, you know, so we have five rescue trucks and five suppressions. We're just now transitioning to suppression captains, which was his my part of my vision. And, and so consequently, we had no relief factor lieutenants. Well, now you're going to have Lieutenant overtime. So as an administrator, my job is to constantly evaluate every aspect of what we do, not just not just fiscally, but But you know, every aspect. And that's, that's why the job of a chief officer is so dynamic. You know, when I was trying to bring a deputy chief up, when I got promoted, I didn't want to go to the outside. And I know you're gonna think this is strange, because people go, Well, you got hired from the outside. Why are you going to give other chiefs the opportunity? Well, I gotta tell you, I'm part of the Boynton Beach family right now. I'm a Boynton Beach Fire Chief. And I want to honor the tradition, the 100 year old tradition of my amazing Fire Department. When I came into this department, I didn't want to change the badges and the patches and the uniforms. I didn't want to come in with all Dade County's policies. I want it to to flourish, allow Boynton Beach to flourish. And I want it to be that cheerleader in charge that maintain the history and the culture to a degree as long as it was a functional culture. But But how can I bring my experience to change that game? And that and that led into mental health? So I'd like to if I could kind of just go through this mental health aspect a little bit. May I do that? Oh, please, please. Okay, so again, I started the dialogue by saying none of what we have enabled and i i say i but it's really we, you know, I may be the cheerleader in charge, and I may be the guy that's got to stand up there and talk about it. But I can't do anything, James. A leader is nothing without the men and women that, you know, that I serve with. So I'm honored to serve with

those men and women. And I'm honored that I was able to bring someone up through the ranks to serve as my deputy chief from within the organization to honor the culture. And to add to it almost it almost let the firefighters there feel as though Wow, after five or six years of really bad leadership while we have our department back. So imagine what that does for men and women who have dedicated their life to this department. Right? You know, there's so many other departments but the men and women who choose to stay in Boynton look at their department with pride and look at it with honor and are able to to go to work every day and serve to a higher level, because because I was able to come in and work with them collaboratively, to not to not change them to what I want, but to help the department grow for what's the best for the department and the folks so. So again, it starts with that leadership and with the elected officials and trust is the number one thing in the mental health aspect of first responders trust. So as we talk about the models, as we talk about what works and doesn't work, we go back to the initial stages of, of how the mental health aspect in the last 12 years has changed. So what what has really changed, what has changed is that we we've gotten a really good in the fire service and recognition, right? That was recognition was the buzzword for the last 10 years. Resiliency is the buzzword of today. And I'll get to that in a minute. So we become really adept at recognizing, in other words, what I mean by that is, I've worked in a station with a firefighter A and B, and I'm Lieutenant see, and firefighter A is always coming to work late, and he's always got issues, but I just blow it off. And he's a he's an ass, you know, I don't really, you know, let's just go run our calls. And and let's not worry about it. Well, that's not the right way in the fire service or the culture should be, we have a culture of taking care of our own, we have a culture of making sure that, you know, if, if it's three in the morning, and I'm on rescue, and the tones go off, or a multicam company response, and my driver isn't getting out of bed, I'm not just going to jump in the truck and leave them which trust me, you know, that happens. I'm going to go get his ass out of bed and go What's wrong with you? So you know, the point is that we've learned how to take care of each other. We've learned how to recognize when mental health issues exist within our community. But that's where the that's where the last 10 years ended. And what I mean by that is, is that once the recognition came now, we go well, now what? Now we recognize that firefighter a has an issue, but what do we do with this guy? Okay, well, we send them to EAP. That's our answer for you yours, our answer was, oh, I will just send them to your IP EAP has therapists and has people that will help. So we as firefighters are trusting individuals, some of us, and we're trusting that the mental health community and EAP has our back, while boy, did they not. And it isn't a fault of their own. It's the fault of the system, James. It's a fault of the mental health system, just as it is with any system, where you get these folks that think, Oh, well, we're doing the right thing. But what they weren't doing was the last five or six years, which you've heard from the mental health community and myths, and this is spot on, is how the only way that you're going to learn to be able to treat this subset of society, whether it be police or fire, the number one thing is you must learn and understand the culture. Okay, there's no way.



1:58:23

And again, there's no way a marriage therapist that has no trauma training, or certification and has no knowledge of the culture of the fire service can treat a firefighter? Well, they can, and they do every day. But you're gonna have and this is my humble opinion, I don't have the data to back it up, other than the fact that I treated hundreds of first responders with iasis, who were also going to therapy, and who I guided to the right kind of therapist. So the last five years now, we're starting to learn the the mental health community is learning. Okay, well, number one, we have to make sure we provide trauma trained therapists, because with the firefighters and police officers are suffering from his trauma. how do we how do we help them through their

trauma. And number two, the only way we can do that is understanding culture. And number three, which is the most important is trust. Because if you go back to the critical incident stress management days when that was the big thing, and a lot of departments, unfortunately, CSM is still part of behavioral health and it should be thrown out the window. Because it doesn't work. It leads it leads to further issues. And it needs to be done through a peer support model, which uses pieces of CISF. We still don't want to get rid of all of it. But the point is we put firefighters in a room to talk who had prior trauma and and we found that we were causing more harm than good. I actually co authored a paper that has been published yet. And it was published in small circles with Dr. Dudley tuning, who's an ISS provider, an ex Air Force fighter pilot, who became a therapist who did a lot of research on the fact that we were driving, you could potentially drive a firefighter or first responder, deeper down the rabbit hole if you put them in a group setting, if they've suffered from childhood trauma. So it's the mental health community learning that number one, we have to understand culture, we have to build trust, meaning that when we talk in these public settings, that the mental health professional isn't going to go back to the fire chief, and divulge, you know, sensitive HIPAA related mental health information. And the only way that you're going to build trust is one case at a time. One firefighter at a time, do we begin to build trust? So how do we how do we achieve this? Well, some fire departments maintain EAP programs. And now the model for the future is to move away from EAP. It's the model of the future. But unfortunately, that costs more money. And the reason we want to move away from it now from both a firefighter union large as a as a group, we have to take this bull by the horns. And we have to make sure that we provide a different model. And what I mean by that is, if you go to a standard EAP model, that's that's administered by a third service insurance provider. What kind of therapists do you think you're going to get change? They pay those therapists 40 or 50 bucks an hour. All right, this is reality. Here, I'm talking reality. If you go, if you have a heart condition, do you want to go to the to the heart guy that got up, you know, seasoned DS in college and has bad reviews? Or do you want to go to the top of the line doc, this is no different for our, our first responders who deserve nothing but the best. I don't want my firefighter who's having issues, go to a marriage counselor, or someone that doesn't have this trauma training or cultural awareness training, who's making 40 bucks an hour, who could give a shit and less about my firefighter, you know what I'm saying, I am going to contract out with a provider. And right now, and I'm not, I'm not just trying to throw her a plug. This is just one of many psychologists out there who have groups who and in our particular case, we contract with command counseling. And that's Marie Guma, who runs this organization. And we have a contract with Dr. Guma, who comes into our fire department who provides for us for \$1 amount, X number of, of sessions of therapy sessions talk therapy sessions, with a first responder annually. They provide semi or annual mental health checkups. So each of our people know where they stand. And that's done through an ace survey and a survey determines your trauma. It isn't that you know, and it isn't something administration needs to know about or or should care about. But we should never put our people in groups, CIS Sam or therapy sessions until we know their prior trauma. James, if someone's had childhood trauma from a bad divorce abuse, concussion syndrome, because physical abuse or physical trauma manifests with the same symptomology psychological symptomology as psychological trauma. So if we don't pre identify our firefighters trauma, how do we know how to treat them? How do we know what to do for them? If we don't know if they haven't suffered trauma as a child, if they didn't serve as a Marine and got blown up in their Humvee? We need to know this information so we can properly treat our people. So our contracted mental health professional does the annual screenings, does annual training, semi annual training and listen, our training for mental health isn't just about recognition and resilience and how do we have resiliency, we bring in wives we bring in children, we bring in we have mother and daughter events where mothers and daughters fathers and sons. So So in my opinion, in my humble opinion, we have the absolute crimer of mental health providers and a mental health program.

And it starts with number one if you can create through an EAP model and listen Delray Beach does this chief talked to Tommy's a good friend of mine, they really wanted to go with a third service model, because it's the best it's the best model. But again, you have entities where you're fighting an uphill battle. He fought or uphill battle with his elected officials were the city leadership with the people who ran EAP. Who thought oh, well, I'm an EAP. Therapist, I know more than you cheese. So no, we're not going to allow you, I'm going to stand up there and argue against you that, you know, that my raa model is more cost effective than bringing in another provider. And so and that's not to say that del Rey is not getting service, because they are because they've been able to stand up and say, Okay, well, if you're not going to allow me to contract provider, we still need culturally competent certified trauma therapists in the EAP. Program. So are they getting the what I would call the concierge type of, of mental health provider coverage? No, but at least they're making progress. Right. So I'll let you interject there. If you want for a second, and then I'm going to get on to peer support. Yeah,

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James Geering 2:05:55

no, absolutely. I want to I want to just interject, because it's something that I've talked about quite a bit recently, having tested for so many departments, I saw a lot of commonalities. You know, you or I are young 18 year olds want to be firefighters, you know, 2022, whatever. And, you know, you do a background check. Okay, did they actually do anything naughty? You know, and also, is it forgivable, I think some of the smaller elements that people are disqualified for on a, on a recruitment application, arguably, you're dismissing a lot of very good candidates, because they tried something, they were younger, or they had a speeding ticket, or whatever it was, you know, a lot of the people that are going to do what we do, probably weren't in church studying the Bible for the first 20 years of their life. But also from a mental health point of view. For me, you know, it was it was the background check, it was the written test, it was the physical test, see, Pat, whatever the comparable arm was in a maybe an EMS assessment. So you found out what kind of person they are from the background, you found out what kind of person they are, as far as operationally, but then there was a polygraph. And the sight tests, which is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, the MMPI. Fast forward, you know, lots and lots of years and the beginning of this podcast, you realize that, and I realize even then the polygraph is complete smoke and mirrors, you know, it's absolutely BS just to get you to admit to something. And then the MMPI was never, ever meant to be a standalone test to determine if someone has what it takes to be a firefighter. And I've had many, many people from psychology world say that. So you've got two bags of money right there, from the hiring process, that are literally being completely wasted, and I would argue, is probably hundreds and hundreds of dollars. So there is your money to start supplementing bringing on a counselor for your department. Because now what I say is in lieu of that, give these new recruits six sessions, you know, in the in their first three months, six months, whatever it is, you normalize the mental health conversation, you remove the barrier to entry to a counselor if and when someone would need it. And you've given as you said, a lot of the people in uniform, we do have high childhood trauma scores, you've given these young men and women an opportunity to start offloading some of the things that they brought into the profession. Because in the firefighter mental health discussion, you never hear about sleep deprivation, you never hear about childhood trauma. Oh, it's James's what you saw it was that kid it? Was that drowning? Yes, that was part of it. But you're missing so many other elements. So I love your model. But when people say, oh, yeah, but that's more money. I would argue if you do poorly in Psych assessments, and you're wasting that money, there's some money to start working towards

getting a counselor that you actually respect and knows how to interact with firefighters that would be an asset and create an incredibly positive mental health environment and your fire department.



2:08:54

Absolutely, absolutely. And then again, we go back to the other part of this discussion, which also was what is it? What is it once they're on the job? What is the cost savings from, from having to, you know, again, anxiety, depression, medications, all these things? Because listen, just because you hire someone new on the department, that may make it through the hiring process, you know, they could get on a call and and have a flashback to some trauma, a traumatic event that occurred I mean, I mean, I've I've heard of this happening firsthand, where you know, there was a an individual hired by department who was a Marine who served and who served had been more time and saw a lot of action and battle saw a tremendous amount of death and, and horrible things that are seen in the in the theater of war, comes back becomes a firefighter paramedic, gets on a call, sees something on a call that triggers a flashback to when they were in battle. And now that person is now no longer functioning as a human being. And and what is the choice? Do we flood That personnel of the fire service and then they wind up committing suicide, or whatever? Or do we embrace that individual? And do we get them the proper care? So again, I agree with you. And I also would argue that it's the it's the savings of the of the cost factor. And one may say, Well, you know, we have insurance for that. But the bottom line is insurance premiums are higher, because of the amount of usage within these within these things. Don't Don't think for one second, that when when one of these large medical providers comes to a fire department, that the first thing they're going to look at is, well, we had how many of these people are taking all these medications? And how much money is that going to cost us as an insurance company, we're going to pass that on to the premium costs. So I mean, ultimately reduce premiums, healthier workforce, less sick, leave less overtime, all of this, you can very easily, you know, extrapolate into into a good mental health program. And I would tell you, I would if it was, again, my choice would be and it was my choice. When I got to Boynton my choice was to focus on mental health, focus on providing the right mental health. The other stuff down the road, the 24/7 etoos, the, you know, departments that are on a 56 hour workweek, they need to aspire to go to a 52 hour workweek with a six week Kelly, they guys that are on a 52 need to aspire to a 48 with a three week Kelly, that you're not going to, you're not going to jump a department to where we are overnight. But what you must do the most important aspect, the most important part of this conversation, James is creating a functional behavioral health access plan for your phone. That's number one, you got to take care of you got to protect and take care of what you've got first. You know, the rest of this whole dialogue we've had is great. But if you're not taking care of the people you've got it's debt. It's building again, it's building on that shaky House of Cards, right, just to



James Geering 2:12:05

jump in as well. One of the other places where people bleed money or department excuse me bleed money is retention. And you know, Marion, which is the reason why I found myself and HMC, they had two suicides in within about eight weeks of each other, both young young firefighters. And then that was one of four I think in five years. And it's not it's a large kind of very in a very, very small urban sabini Serb suburban and rural departments. So there's not 1000s of people in this county. So the you know, percentage wise, it was haunting, but they are

a quote unquote, stepping stone department, you know, we have been that the Florida fire college here, people come out the back doors of that, you know, graduated, they'll work in Marion, or they'll come in even you know, when a non CERT program get put through school. And the they told me it was basically 15,000 I think it was dollars per recruit. Now, if that recruit, works a year, two years, three years and then walks out the back door of that department and goes back down south or, you know, goes to somewhere because now like Gainesville, Florida is going to be moving to 2472 Very recently, very soon. Now, that's 15 grand you lost 15 grand, he lost 15 grand he lost. So the other conversation of the staffing crisis is again, this ties into mental health. If your people are feeling taken care of, and they feel they have mental health support, and you're working towards a in a work week and working conditions that are better, and you're you're you're improving the pay, they're not going to go anywhere, they're going to stay there because that's all they wanted. They wanted to be a firefighter, they got to walk out, put a uniform on and the calls are getting in my county, are there good calls, it's a good department, they take the training seriously. But they look around and see the pay and see the worst weeks of the other ones and they get mandatory to death at the moment here too. So that's the other part of the conversation. Every single person you keep, not only you gaining knowledge and improving camaraderie in that department and morale, but also that's 10s of 1000s of dollars you're saving by not having to recruit another person to fill that void.



2:14:12

Yeah, no doubt, no doubt. But think of this though. Think of this also kind of in a big picture thought right? And go bigger than that right. Now. Take what you just said. And think about this. Do you for one second, understand the enormity and the stress and the amount of energy that it takes that fire chief for that department to fight to get to where I am in my department, do you? I mean, a lot of these guys and gals that run these departments, they just don't have it. It's an enormous undertaking for them. They look at this and say, I don't even have good fire equipment. I don't even have the best gear. I don't even have enough air packs or my guys, I can't even buy you know, you know, replacement SCBA masks. because they won't give me enough money in my budget, how is that guy or gal running that fire department going to be able to get where I am, when they can't even do the basics. And it's not it's nothing against them. It's just that they keep getting beaten down by these by these administrators above the fire department that don't take public safety as a concern. And there's so they're also concerned with using the tax dollars for other means that that unfortunately, the fire department becomes a redheaded stepchild and no one's advocating for us. So you know, think about that, that that's the that's the bigger problem. That's why I wish I could somehow motivate, teach and train these chief officers that aspire and attain these positions. It isn't just about coming to work in the morning and running your department, you have got to challenge those above and next to you, you've got to challenge everyone to make it better. And and you can make it better if there's no money.



James Geering 2:16:03

Yeah, well, also, I would argue, you know, we also challenge the union. You look at most unions, you talked about that airline, you know, most unions when the first things they fix is the work week. You know, I always tell people, there's no kids or chimneys these days, because people stood up. Yeah, our firefighters are dying in droves. So as the IAFF we I paid my dues for my

entire career. If you haven't talked about the firefighter work, we can make an A professionals national standard, then and that's not your priority, then shame on you, you know, I'm sorry, but building one little tiny center in the northeast corner of the country and then going alright, we covered mental health, then. No, you didn't. And there don't get me wrong. There's some great people within unions and some great people I know on the mental health side and peer support within the IFF. But as a national organization, that is who we're relying on to advocate for our profession to create a standard that will then help empower the fire chiefs to go to their cities and counties and say this is how our profession does it. But while we're fragmented and getting no support on that side, I mean, I even spoke to Dr. Laurie Merrill, Merrill, Merrill Meyer, Meyer Merrill, excuse me. And she's our Fire Administrator, and great conversation, but she seemed kind of completely unaware of the workweek issue. And that's how US Fire Administrator. So this is the problem to everyone that's wearing some sort of badge as advocating for our profession. The firefighters of the country need to take a step back and go, Alright, are we holding them accountable? I know, we just had change of leadership in IFF. And I hope it's going to be better. But the firefighter of you know, department X shouldn't have to do it alone. They I'm sure paid Jews for 2030 years before they even put a gold badge on their chest. That's who we also need to get support from is you know, if we are in a union, and it kills me that we have Spanish unions, you know, women's unions are your word union means us coming together, and all we've done is pigeon holed ourselves. So we need to come back together as a profession, and advocate for our men and women and give these departments the support, and the the guidelines and the education and the standards so that we can move the needle forward. Because it's the only union I know, that beats his chest saying it's the greatest union in America, but has the worst working conditions. Well,



2:18:27

let me tell you something, but and let's let's listen, since we're hitting that topic, why do you think that is? Why do you think there are the Hispanic unions and the professional, the professional African American unions? Why do you think there's all these unions? These unions are have cropped up, because as as, unfortunately as subsets, because obviously the main domain union that we all are a member of as firefighters has led us down. I mean, it is what it is. I mean, listen, I listen, I love the fact listen, I'm still a member of the IFF even as a fire chief, okay, I still believe in unions, I still believe they have their rightful place if done correctly, again, not to bleed the country dry because I think that's ridiculous, but you know, they have a purpose and that purpose is to make sure that our people are safe, that they have good working conditions good salaries, not not but not to take advantage. So you've you've heard that from me. So but but I'm very critical also of that other side of the Union perspective and I'm, I'm actually very critical about the mental health aspect of this from the IFF. And if you'll go and look at me speaking, you know, in other events and other areas and on tape, I've even said I said I'm very critical about the Center for Excellence. You know, I've had I've had firefighters that I know that have gone there, and I know how it operates and and listen again, it boils back to as a well intended body. What do you do you trust the mental health community? So you go to the mental health committee and say, Okay, I want you guys to help by we're going to spend money on this. I On this place, we're going to be able to send our firefighters who are suffering, we're going to support the mental health by creating these things at the IFF. And I applaud the IFF for doing that. The problem again becomes when you go to the mental health community, and that mental health person's got a PhD and comes back and says, and again, I'm not against education, I'm an educated man myself. But the point is, is that they'll come back and they'll say, Okay, well, we need to do this, this and this, this is how we're going to run this center. And they run the center listening to others. It isn't folks like me and a lot of other folks who have



lived it, who understand what's necessary. And again, that's like using iasis. Let me give you an example. There's a tremendous amount of bias for iasis microcurrent Neurofeedback right now, and it's not just is this there's a tremendous bias, because we live in a pill culture, we live in a society where you know, where the drug lobby has a hold on everybody. And you know, the first answer is to throw to throw them an anxiety mad at you to throw an antidepressant at you. Well, let me tell you something, you know, my brother alluded to it a little bit in his podcast with you. We, in my years of doing iasis, and my wife and all of my staff and the 1000s of treatments, we were assisting many hundreds of people get off their meds. Now, how is that possible? How does, how can I assist do that? It's because it's shifting people from sympathetic to parasympathetic. And it's a game changer. But those in power, those that hold the key, that the AMA, the mental health community, they don't want to, they don't want to give up their ability to prescribe medications, and they want to use other technologies that might not be as effective. I'll give you an example. You know, there's a particular technology out there that's really used by a lot of psychologists for single event trauma. It's, it's like rapid eye movement, almost like a form of biofeedback, but it isn't. Yes. Okay. So EMDR is a great tool. And I'm telling you right now, you'll probably have 100 psychologist who listened to me right now that want to throw stones at me, because you know, they're gonna go, well, EMDR is the greatest thing since sliced bread. Well open up the manual, folks, because EMDR is for single event trauma you can't take and what firefighter has single event trauma? No one, not one, it's impossible, because any firefighter that suffered a traumatic event has more than likely either had physical or emotional trauma in their past. So pretty much no firefighter should ever have the NBR and that's my humble opinion. Okay, I know I'm not a PhD, no, I'm not a therapist. But I am a guy who treated hundreds and hundreds of first responders 1000s of sessions. And I can tell you talk therapy is another one, James, I would never advocate, someone just go for talk therapy. Because let me tell you, if you're stuck in fight or flight, if you're stuck having super high levels of cortisol, to where you're having to take antidepressants, which then create anxiety, and now you're on anti anxiety meds, which causes even more depression, right? The bottom line here is is that by by having the ISS sessions by calming down the sympathetic nervous system and allowing the parasympathetic to take over, we're changing the game. We're, we're changing the dialogue. And once once you begin to shift to a parasympathetic state, now, your mentation, your ability to absorb what a therapist is giving you right. I frequently say that a therapist job is to give our men and women new tools, that's what a therapist does. They mirror back and they give you the tools to manage the situations that you're dealing with, to manage your trauma to recognize your your thing of the past, whatever it is that all these psychologists are doing right? But how could you possibly get into someone, you may make a small difference, you're gonna make a little bit of a help. They might have a session of EMDR that might help. But ultimately, we need to recognize and that's I kind of want to shift for a quick second as we gotta get closer towards the end of our discussion into a behavioral health policy and into the work we're doing, not only at my department, but what we're doing at the county level to try to change the game and part of a functional behavioral health policy and we're not the first one to develop that. Broward has to be half there's a bunch of a bunch of counties He's in and fire chief agencies that have adopted behavioral health policies. They may not be quite as, as all encompassing as ours, because we've taken it to another level. But that discussion and that dialogue of the what ancillary tools are you offering, like, for example, the IFF Center for Excellence is a tool in the tool bag, right? If we have someone that's really having addiction issues, are really in a bad way, we send them there, because that's where everybody says, okay, the IFF gives everybody a break on, on, you know, peer support training. And if you, if you send your people to peer support training, they'll help to send your guys to the Center for Excellence. Well, that's one tool. Personally, I've developed with my mental health professional, local tools, so that if if, if I have someone that's suffering from addiction, I've got a local treatment center that's experienced with first responders, so

that, you know, I've that that's kind of how we've been doing it. And that's not that there are other wonderful ones out there, there's some in Colorado, there's some beautiful people out there that are doing great work. But the point I'm trying to bring out is every behavioral health access plan that is developed by a fire department needs to include these ancillary treatment modalities, one of which is ISIS.

 James Geering 2:26:23

Absolutely nothing, it's phenomenal. So you talk to you about peer support, then let's get to that. And then I want to make sure that we tell the story of how you actually were able to convince you, in this case, your city as well, the, you know, to, to free up the spending, so you could share for 2472 Before we do talk to me about peer support.

 2:26:46

Right. So, you know, when we go back, you know, again, we go back in time, and everything was CIS, Sam and CIS. Sam was really based on a lot of military kind of things going back. And I mean, honestly, peer support, peer support goes back to the 17 and 1800s, when you go back in France, you know, during a war when doctors and French hospitals would, you know, created peer support teams for the nurses and doctors because they were themselves having tremendous mental disorders, because of the enormity of things they were seeing, you know, treating people so peer support goes way back. And and CSM goes way back. And of course, in the beginning, everything was CSM and peer support was kind of a little thing at the bottom, you know, and it was thought that listen, when we have a major event, you know, we need to do a debriefing. We need to get everyone into a room, we need to talk about this well, and you know, it, it had some merit, and it did help. But it wasn't, it wasn't ultimately CISSP is not what's in the best interest of a let's just put it this way. If you look at efficacy, right? That's, that's like comparing ISS to EMDR. If you're looking at efficacy for the specific type of thing that you're looking to treat, you know, it may have a purpose. But I believe now CSM is transformed and now absorbed into peer support. It isn't necessarily diffused things, MD briefings. What we've learned is, is that peer support is absolutely the number one. Well actually the number one thing is that number one, we take care of each other. Number one, we teach each other how to take care of each other at the company level. Now for those that are not first responders, I'm sure a lot of people have heard the company level means at the unit level, on your fire truck on your rescue truck at the company level. It's up to each of you to take care of each other and then at the station level, and then at the battalion level, and then at the shift level. And then at the department level, right. We're all all should be taken care of each other. But how do we accomplish that we accomplish that by creating a solid peer support team. So what we've done is, and we're helping other departments do this as well, and depends on where they are within their peer support journey. But you have to start somewhere. So how we did it in order to achieve trust. We did a survey monkey and we said, how can we ask a couple of a couple of simple questions. Who would you trust? If if you were having issues, and we asked them to name someone on the department. And we had a couple other questions related to peer support and how they felt and you know, if they felt the fire department could be trusted, you know, to be up to be a partner, right? Because Fire Administration must be a partner in this. It can't just be the union running it. It can't just be you know, a mental health arm that's running it or committee mental health committee, your administration has to be the key holder because number one, we manage the budget number two, if it wasn't for the fire administrators, the

union is not going to be able to do it on their own. You have to have the support and management so Basically, the first step was to create this survey monkey to where we surveyed every member of the department, we figured out a top 30 people that were on this list. And then we created a situation where the person who was the most trusted and the most chosen, actually, they were all interviewed. But after the interview process, the interview took place with a representative from the union who was concerned about mental health, the fire chiefs, which was myself, and our health and safety chief, because my assistant chief of training and and health and safety is knee deep in this, you know, there are all all safety and training chiefs in this country, or if you know, if IT departments have spun that off, because they have the resources to have just health and safety chiefs, those health and safety chiefs need to be knee deep in this whole mental health discussion from a fire administration standpoint. So these individuals now get together we did we now do, you know, we answered, have them answer questions, and we do an interview. And then we chose a number that we felt would work for us now for us, I wanted one peer support team member per station, per shift. So for me, that number was 20. And we brought in actually 23. And we had a couple of drop out. So I mean, look at look at my size department. I mean, we're 160 frontline operations personnel, with 21, peer support team members, that's how critical it is you need to throw resources at this, you can't just have one guy in each battalion, or it's going to fail. Because there's an enormous amount of work that peer support has to do behind the scenes. So once once you've gotten your peer support team chosen, you need to develop a peer support team policy or, you know, initially we did a peer policy and then rolled it into a larger behavioral health policy. But from that standpoint, now, once that's created, now, you got to get your people trained. Now, I FF has a training, which is great, their basic peer support, team training is great. And it's offered at a very reasonable cost. There are a couple of other mental health organizations that offer peer support. But the bottom line is you must get your people trained, because it allows them to learn how to manage or at least the beginnings of how to manage individuals in crisis. Now I advocate and we've taken that to the next level. And I suggest to other fire agencies, they do the same, which is to take the training of their peer support team members to the next level. So we waited about a year after everyone was certified, we had some situations under our belt, we had a police officer who died, we had, you know some firefighters with some really serious issues. And we deployed our peer support team even to help our police department. So and we've actually deployed them to help a city staff member who had an issue. So you have to be able to think outside the box and have to be willing to, you know, to do these types of things for your for your program. Now, once we did that a year later, we began to get them advanced training. Now it's actually a brand new program in this country. It's called interventionist certification. So we actually certified the majority of our peer support team, which actually statutorily allows them to take even a more in depth, an active role in the peer support model, meaning that, you know, reaching out and really sitting there, I mean, we're not therapists again, but being trained in emotional release, that person is able to really be there for that firefighter. And more importantly, they're able to get the individual the help that they need. So that's pretty much how we develop the team. And how the team basically functions is there's a coordinator. And we've had every coordinator of every peer support team in Palm Beach County, is now starting to communicate, as we are super close to putting the finishing touches on a countywide behavioral health policy. But it's it's that peer support. That's after the company level after the station level. When something happens that a peer support team member is immediately responds to that individual's needs. And the peer support team member after their initial evaluation, then determines what we need. Do we need to call in? You know, Dr. Guma, and command counseling, do we need to do we need to have a full blown kind of peer support team call out when in other words, was it an event where somebody you know was killed or injured and do we need to call out five or six peer support team members and sit down and chat with every body and the Trying to make them feel

better. So, you know, and at the same time, we're also trying to incorporate canine therapy into this whole process, which is a whole nother discussion. But I think equally as important, you know, within this model, so that's pretty much, you know, I mean, I can go way more in depth with peer support. But I think it's, you know, that the basic gist is, any behavioral health, any mental health model really has a basis in peer support. But at the same time, you have to be able to send your people now, here's a quick benefit. And then I'll let you chime in. When one of my people are in crisis, and they call a peer support team member, within an hour, they're on, they could be on the phone with a therapist within an hour. There are other departments when people are in crisis, and they call an EAP hotline, where they might not get a response for a week, you cannot have someone with suicidal ideation or someone that's in crisis. Wait five minutes, James. So So that's part of our mental health contract with this provider, is also to be available within 60 minutes. And within about 120 minutes, I can put a team of trauma training therapists in any fire station in Palm Beach County. So you know, that's, that's huge. And that's a game changer. But

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James Geering 2:36:17

it's amazing to hear it really is. Dana Alia had on the show once she made a comment, I couldn't agree more. The goal one, there's somebody even needing peer support, you know, the we are cohesive again, like we may have been, let's say, 100 years ago, you know, where hopefully there was vulnerability before this kind of facade of of masculinity. Got a lot of us thinking that we were supposed to be robots. But um, you know, there's such a, excuse me, a massive need for this. And the number of EAP nightmare stories that I've heard on the show really haunts me, because that's the one that lives live to tell the tale. So how many people went to that marriage counselor or the counselor started crying, or they told him to get out, which is what I've been told by many, many people, how many of those people just went went home, put a gun in their mouth, or took a load of pills, or put a hose pipe in their car, you know what I mean? So the leaning into this broken system, I would argue as being fatal for many, many people. And so now again, we're moving forward the peer support model, and I love the fact there's even another level the interventionist, I think this is incredible, this is what we need, and then removing that barrier to entry to that licensed clinician, or that recovery center or, you know, whatever is the next thing, because I get that a lot. Now, the stigma is kind of gone. We got it, you know, we've done lots of push ups, you know, and people get it now. But it's one that what's next, and I think that removing the barrier to entry to getting someone from A to B as quickly as possible, is important. But the other thing that I'm not seeing, I think we really need to do is really lean into that post, excuse me, post traumatic growth element as well, because we've removed the hope from the Mental Health conversation, oh, well, you know, Steve, we'll send you the center. And you know, we'll get you over this thing. But not, when you process the trauma, this is going to become a strength for you. Now, you're going to become a beacon of light for other people, because you've managed to move forward and doesn't mean it's gone away forever. But you've you know, I would literally say it was a superpower, someone who's navigated trauma and then processed it healthily, through as you said, the toolbox from Asus to, you know, psychedelic therapy to equine therapy, canine, whatever it is, your personal individual toolbox. And the other side is an incredibly hopeful, beautiful place. But it's so doom and gloom in our message. So a you've got this EAP Russian Roulette that most people are subjected to, and then be, you know, the stigma is really like, Oh, I'm gonna live with this forever. Well, yes, of course, some people, as with any conversation, some people may not be able to navigate all the way through, most people are going to be so much stronger on the other side, and they're also going to be with their lived experience, they're going to then be able to help other people and be vulnerable with their

story and open doors for others to come in and seek help. So and that is peer support, that is not EAP that is not CSM, that is peer support, you know, and being being an example of post traumatic growth. So I think that that hope and that post traumatic growth conversation is something that we really need to have. And then as you're talking about, you know, the peer support teams, the higher level of training, getting to the point where you have many people in the fire department that are able to have these conversations that's the biggest thing is just it's a very hard conversation to have and if you yourself haven't kind of navigated some trauma come out the other end is kind of like you with your, you know, gypsy like career in the fire service as well. If you just worked for Miami Dade, you wouldn't have the lens that you have now, but because you work for so many Different places you do. So I think I mean, everything that you said, I just want to underline. I think it's fantastic. And this is the way forward.



2:40:07

Yeah, yeah, there's no doubt. And, you know, you asked me Well, how was I able to achieve this? And I'm gonna tell you the number one thing I've said, not only to try to move forward some of these mental health initiatives, which includes some of these fringe technologies, which are showing tremendous promise, like ISS, you know, and standing at the Dyess and talking, you know, one of the things one of the reasons we were successful was because of our overtime, you know, we showed that we were able to reduce overtime, thereby saving money. So, you know, the million and a half dollars, million seven, whatever it might have cost, that number, you know, let's say we were spending two 2,000,002.2 on overtime, you know, you know, people are all about money. So from a money standpoint, I was able to stand up at the Dyess and say, Look, you know, we're going to be able to reduce overtime tremendously. And at the same time, if you're at all concerned, this is this is you know, it's storytelling. You remember, I keep I keep commenting on the cheerleader in charge as the fire chief. It's my job, every one of us that wears that Schiff bugle, it's our responsibility to be able to articulate not only our ability to be fiscally responsible and transparent and ever analyzing everything we do for the betterment of our city, the betterment of our department or municipality, the betterment of our workers. But it's how do we change the game? How do we become leaders of leaders? James, that's when you pose that app to an elected official and say, Do you it's great that we just run Boynton Beach? It's great that we're doing our job here. But what is Boynton Beach doing to change the game for other cities and other departments? What what proactive steps so again, that's why I went back in the beginning of this part of the discussion, getting accolades to my elected officials, because it was them. And every time I speak, I give them so much accolades. Because they listened to me, James, they listened with open eyes, open ears, they, they they had a general the strategic planning of where they felt their constituency wanted the city to go with public safety being the number one concern, but how do you achieve that. And so by proving number one, that we're being more fiscally responsible, that we're trying to reduce overtime, this is not only a method to reduce the overtime, but it's a method to improve the mental health of our first responders. And again, I've had a little backlash lately, you know, not in a bad way. But, you know, some of the city leaders kind of came back and go, Hey, you know, this is costing, you know, a little bit more money than we thought. And I said, Well, if you remember, if you go back to my statements on the day, a couple of years ago or a year ago, we don't, we don't really know what the total implication is going to be. Because, you know, we've never done this before. And you can't you can compare us to Boca and Delray and county, but by the same token, you can't, because there are too many other factors involved in each idiosyncrasy within each organization. So my statement is, what gets them interested is, I'm going to save over time. The second thing, I'm going to improve first responder mental health. The third thing, we are going to be leaders within our community, who doesn't want to

be a leader who does not? Well, a lot of people, but I mean, when you're an elected official, and you're running a municipality, you want to be a leader within and without your community. So, you know, it's kind of that three prong approach, but you got to put your money where your mouth is, if I didn't have any credibility as a fire chief, you know, if if, for example, when I had meetings with elected officials, or you know, in general at the Dyess or, you know, when I have, you know, meetings with senior staff, you know, when they come to me and say, wow, you know, your people, your people really love you and, and, man, you're really well respected. Why is that? It isn't because I got this big head, I'm off in the corner pumping my my own horn. It's because I dedicate my life to them, James. It isn't about me. Because what I do when I get off on what fuels me, what gives me energy what I get out of all this are the blessings that I've received from living this life of service. And so when I stand at the Dyess and I talk about that life of service when I storytel, and it's not bullshit, it's real when they see a man who's who's an Air Force veteran, who served 40 plus years. Who is able to lead with honor who is able to bring an organization from the Abyss into, into what I would call highly functioning organization? That's very well respected thing. So I could be the best administrator in the world, I could be a chief in Des Moines, Iowa, who goes to their leadership and wants to do this, and they're gonna go, they're gonna laugh them out of the room, because that person may lack integrity, not that that Chief does if you're listening, but you know, I'm just saying, you have to bring something to the table more than just the data. You have to, you have to be able to show and prove what you've done. What is your worth? Where are your goals? What are you trying to accomplish, and if your goals, if your only goals in your life and in your career are to make it better for other people, there's nothing that will stop anyone from achieving those, those goals.

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James Geering 2:46:08

I couldn't agree more. And what's so beautiful about this conversation is, as I told you, the other day, as we sit here recording, this is the act of the seventh anniversary of the behind the shield podcast, and it was fire fire funerals that made me start this podcast, it was, again, you know, the resistance that you have seen that a lot of people that are listening, certainly have seen from within a fire department that made me transition out to be able to speak freely, and bring all the experts in and, and share this information globally, you know, without any barrier to entry without any, you know, anyone telling me I can't say this or can't talk about that. And here we are seven years later, having a conversation where, you know, you have addressed numerous things. And again, this is the point is is not saying Alright, everyone's going to be fine now. But the problem in these conversations are Oh, yeah, but you know, yeah, but there was that one person. So let's not do that. This is going to have such an amazing impact on the men and women of Boynton Beach, and so many different ways. And I want to thank you so much for storytelling, because you we've been talking for almost three hours now. And like you said, there's 1000 Other things that we could have dived into, from echo from canine therapy to deeper into peer support. But by telling us the story, I hope I pray that it's given people listening, whether it's some, you know, rural department in in the Midwest, or whether it's someone in an urban department, but give them an understanding of the impact of some of these elements of that phrase, you know, they did the best with what they had, you know, we refer to that a lot with our forefathers but it's up to this generation now to go Alright, here's what does work, you know, these things are working really well. But these things here, we have devolved as the fire service has gone from literally sitting around waiting for a fire solely to jack of all trades, master of none that we are today. You know, we have to we have to catch up, we've we've fallen behind. And you've you've kind of created a beautiful map, you've talked about some resources, you've walked the walk with your own department, obviously, alongside the men and women that were part of that movement. So I want to thank you so much before I

let you go, there must be lots and lots of people now that are listening that would love to connect with or reach out, maybe learn about the program that you're putting together where you know, you can help others start moving the needle. So where are the best places online for that?



2:48:39

Well, I would I would say that listen, I'm I'm fully willing to share my email and my cell number. My, my email at Boynton Beach is brooder H vru. Er H had bb fl.us. That my personal email, which is Mr. brooder, at Gmail, just Mr. br UD er at Gmail, or go ahead, text me give me a call, you know, if I'm available, if I'm not out flying an airplane or I'm not, you know, managing investments or running a fire department then I would, I would definitely love to chat and talk and my cell phone number is area code 954-214-1494. And, you know, in closing, I really I just would, you know, again, one more little kind of motivational thing for folks out there that are in my position. You can do this. You need to surround yourself with the right people that have the right energy. But more importantly, you need to surround yourself with people that have the same like minded heart. It's all about heart and it's all about passionate and it isn't just good enough to go to work and collect that paycheck. It isn't just good enough to try to be the best fire department that does the best front row. his lane has the best drafting equipment and the best, you know, the best engines and the best platforms and I've got the best, you know, I'm doing core pull blood on my rescue calls and I'm doing state of the art medical shit, it isn't enough. It's never gonna be enough. And the only way it's gonna get better is if each and every one of you wearing that fifth bugle, listen to what I'm saying reaches out and understands the power is in your hands. It's in your hands to make a difference. It's an enormous, enormous undertaking. It takes an enormous amount of time and energy. And I know a lot of you may or may not even want to go there with this. But if you're ready, when you're ready, I'd be more than happy to be there for each and every one of you. I've enjoyed my life of service I will like I said, probably die with a badge on but you know, that's what I want. It's not poor whew, oh, God, he needs to retire and go play golf. Well, I already did that. You No, I don't need that. This is what I need. This is what makes me feel good is to help other human beings and make our fire service the best that can be so I really appreciate the opportunity to spend this time with you. And again, I'll be available for anyone anytime.