

# Jeremy Donch - Episode 809

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fire, people, service, firefighter, conversation, podcast, put, give, work, good, department, kids, job, talk, love, years, day, man, volunteer, shit

## SPEAKERS

James Geering, Jeremy Donch

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James Geering 00:00

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Jeremy Darche enjoy Jeremy I want to say firstly, thank you so much. We had an amazing conversation when I came on your podcast National Fire Radio and I did warn you then that I was going to flip the microphone round. So here we are. Welcome to the behind the shield podcast today.

 03:47

I love being on the other side of this man. Usually I'm the guy that's got to put the time in facilitate the conversation, ask the questions, prompt the guest and this time I did nothing for this. I literally just jumped on eating an apple finishing my lunch that Let's go man, let's just talk. That's what this is about. Right? It's literally just talk. Let's go.

 James Geering 04:07

Absolutely well for people listening. Where are we finding you on planet Earth today?

 Jeremy Donch 04:12

We're all over. You know, National Fire Radio was a platform that we rolled out myself and a couple other partners Rob Ridley Sebastian Rolo, and I got a team behind us now that helped us in about five and a half years ago, I saw a need for spreading the good word and protecting the good word of the American fire service. And so we started National Fire Radio, which began as a podcast to capture the stories in perpetuity too many guys were leaving the job pissed off and disgruntled. It's not just the fire service. It's every industry you could possibly imagine. There's been a tremendous disconnect between young and old. And when we have that disconnect feelings get hurt and when feelings get hurt. Guys who had 2025 3040 years of experience typically leave on a bad note. And we don't want that. What we want to do is capture their experience and knowledge and perpetuity and that's what the podcast was built on, right. So ultimately it was to capture stories of the senior men leaving the fire service, the fire service is built on tradition and culture. And that's through experience knowledge, know how which takes time. You can't rush it, it's like a bottle of wine, you can't rush it. And so we need the stories of those that came before us to live long. And when the guys are leaving and taking all that experience and knowledge with them, and they're not leaving it behind, because they're pissed off the last three years of their job, they were angry or disgruntled. But the 27 years before that were gold. When they leave in those last three years, and then they get up and walk out the door, they don't leave anything behind, we lose, we lose, the public loses. And so for us National Fire Radio rolled out as a podcast to capture those stories in perpetuity. And it's been a hell of a ride. And I'm loving every second of it. And from there, as you know, NFR has become a full social media, marketing and media space, where we do creative design, execution and delivery on all sorts of different projects. And we take permissions in so many different lanes, because we've been allowed to, because our content from day one has been authentic and transparent. We're not pulling the wool over anybody's eyes. We are who we are, and people trust the word that we spread.

 James Geering 06:16

Well I want to get the very beginning of your timeline. But before we do you hit a topic just

well, I want to get the very beginning of your timeline. But before we do you hit a topic, just them that I've talked about quite a lot. This is a highly unpopular conversation in the fire service. But like so many highly unpopular conversations, it's because it's actually needed. And it makes sense. When I hear for example, and this is just the sacrificial lamb that represents the complete resistance to acknowledge where we're really shit and forced change the American fire helmet, there's all this frickin needle deck making fun of the European helmet. And we wear these fucking giant leather sombreros beating our chest when the reality is, there is better technology out there. That's just, that's just, it is what it is, you know, it's just



07:01

listen, it's, I'll cut you off here, because I, I, listen, I am all about innovation and change. But there's also reasons why tradition matters. Well, I'll jump



James Geering 07:15

in again, the word tradition. Does that mean equipment? Or is tradition actually camaraderie, courage, selflessness? Is it that piece of equipment that's tradition, or is actually those those tenets that are truly tradition of the fire?



07:29

So I think it's a little bit of all of it. I don't think we can narrow in and I don't think we can vilify the leather American fire helmet, just like we vilify the European style helmet, right? I think what matters is they're both do the job, maybe one might be superior now through technology and advancement. And all of that, I get that, right? By how many guys are dying because it get knocked on the head? Right, let's, let's have some real conversation. And so like, I look at it this way, if a leather fire helmet builds, the camaraderie, the excitement, the old school draw, it pulls in some of that tradition, and we don't go over to the euro fire home, and I'm okay with that. Like, not everything needs to change, not everything needs to change quickly. And I think change done for the sake of change is not good. And I think we have to respect the foundation from which we come. I mean, it's not that the fire service is that old couple 100 years old, it's not that old, right? I mean, America, the world, we're not that old. Why are we rushing everything so fast, and all of a sudden innovation is here. And trust me, I'm a guy that's innovating in the American fire service with our platform, we're delivering content and creating content differently than anybody's ever done before. And I'm not saying we're the only ones that do that. But we are certainly a leader in the social media space on publicizing the fire service. So that's innovative, but we can't jam that down people's throats and also vilify guys that don't do that. So we have to find this fine balance. So whether it's delivery of content creation of content, or the leather fire helmet versus the euro fire helmet, I think sometimes we get caught up too hard in the facts, when there's other extenuating circumstances that need to be reviewed. And if that means, you know, a leather fire helmet needs to stay traditional in the American Fire Service. I'm certainly okay with that. Does that mean though, that we should not look at other opportunities or alternatives? No, look at the science. Look at the facts. Look at the the wear, let your people try them, and let them make an educated decision. I think when we hold back and don't give our people the opportunity to make decisions, or we don't allow people to find a different way, where we are, we are now debilitating the ability to grow. And I don't think we should do that. We can't stymie growth. We can't vilify growth for the sake of

vilifying it. But I think there's nothing wrong with the leather American fire helmet. In fact, I will wear one today I dye my coffin and I will not wear your helmet and it's strictly because of the tradition For me what it means to me. Now, you tell me five years from now that the technology is so incredible that it will save my life and blah, blah, blah. And when it goes on and on and on, then you really got to start having some hard conversations. But I think that the the difference between the two, I think there's extenuating circumstances that need to be considered other than just science and practicality. I don't know. That's me.

 James Geering 10:24

So this is I'm having this conversation because no one does. And what nauseates me is this whole anti European helmet and the reality is just like you said, if you're educated on other other technology, and you acknowledge, okay, this actually is better in Area A, B, C, and D. But I choose to wear my helmet, leather helmet, knowing that it's actually a lesser helmet, but I want to wear this helmet. Beautiful, but all I ever see in the fire. So the American fire services, I'm not wearing that space helmet. When this helmet has comps built in the years when it has a flashlight in the top where you don't take it off to go inside a car like all of us do, and put our LEDs on, you know what I mean? There are a lot of pros. So I think it was told and a fair shot was given to other technology I would get in because I'm guessing you don't wear three quarter length boots anymore, or will tunic, you know what I mean? We do progress at some point. But if we constantly are more worried, and this is just my perspective, there's a lot of people out there, you know, 19 year olds, all of a sudden have you know, big old, you know, 30 year salty trucker, mustaches and everything that it's really about how they look, which is ultimately vanity. So if we're talking about it's for them, then for them means choosing the best technology and like you said, doesn't mean that you should never be able to wear something else. But it should be brought into the conversation and educated and be like, Alright, here's a good shot, good choice because a navy seals, and they're not wearing tin helmets. But that's basically the era that our American helmet was first found it was in the 30s. So almost 100 years old. Now.

 12:00

I will say this though, I think what's really cool about today's fire service, you bring up 19 year old kids and the vanity of it right and the look, I think there's nothing wrong with that away, though. I think that it's okay that they want to look the part play the part dress the part. Now obviously, their actions and mentality have to match, right? There's I'm not I'm not taking anything away from that, right? Because the job is the job and then everything else is added. Right. But the job truly is the service to people, right, the selfless act of protecting life and property. And that's the mission of fire of the American fire service. Right? Always has been. But with that comes so much fun. And so much excitement about it that we should allow our 19 year olds to want to dress the part play the part be saltier than they were we all did it. Right. And I think there's nothing wrong with that. Because a good that's the hook. Like, in a in a world today where blue collar is down. We don't even possess the opportunity to give kids the opportunity to learn if they want to be a mechanic, an HVAC technician drive a shit truck for a living, right like that. We don't give people those options anymore. My kids schools have taken away all the blue collar classes, no woodshop, metal shop, drafting, auto shop, all the classes I took, because those are the things that excited me. They've taken all that off the table and not even giving kids those choices anymore. And yet we need those jobs more than ever, and a lot

of kids are suited for that. And not a four year five year degree white collar job, they come out and they're disillusioned. So we need to do that in the fire service too. We are losing people every single day in the fire service. We are losing experience out the door after 2025 30 We're losing experience after 14 years James you know that don't you losing guys, we're losing. Exactly brother. I learned that about you. And that matters to me, right? We lost the guy with experience but you're doing it through different means now you have your podcast you have a way to put it out there my point is we can't lose the knowledge and experience that we've had and not be able to fill those boots and however we fill them we need to but the mission matters. But so do the upbringing and those foundational blocks along the way and so if some of that family sure if some of that is looks and and not practicality. I'm okay with that as long as it's fueling the passion and filling the spots and bringing people in and giving them some emotional ownership of it as well I think is important.

J

James Geering 14:26

So I called the helmet the sacrificial lamb for just that. I really couldn't give a rat's ass what anyone wears but it does symbolize the resistance to change. Yeah, when we're talking about losing firefighters at the moment to me something that I have you talked about dying on your saw the work week is what I've been talking about since day one. Not getting rid of 20 fours 20 fours to me are needed in the fire service with master or not master screaming jack of all trades, master of none. have so many skills. You need that period of time you come in and checked out everything and done some training and done your Fitness, you know, you're you're pretty much at nighttime now. And it just doesn't make sense to me to do eights or twelves personally. But the 2472 is what should be a complete national standard. And we we have admiration for example for the Northeast for New York, and they work 4042 hour work weeks, then you got the most most of us work 56 Federal guys work 72. And then obviously, with the short staffing, now you're getting into 80 plus hour work weeks. So I bring the helmet in just as that kind of ignition source to look at the things that we also accept and refuse to change that we should have been fighting tooth and nail for for years, because I would argue, this intelligent young community that we've got these days has the ability to do research and look at what is the fire service actually that like any single one of us that served for longer than a couple of years is there because they actually care. And this is a burning desire, which is why I left wearing a uniform to carry on the exact same mission without the handcuffs or working for a department. But that advocacy for change, because we don't work in a station that runs to structure fires a week, and we used to sit around smoking cigars and petting the Dalmatian. Now our men and women are getting murdered 24 hours a day. And this is the reason why a lot of them are leaving disgruntled because the environment has devolved, and the work week hasn't evolved with it. So you know, that's why I mean, yeah, the leather helmet is something that no one ever has. But it's a metaphor. Please, please,

i

16:33

I push you on that just a little bit. I'm curious, right? The fire service is not a career that we've gotten into people have gotten into career volunteer, right, it just across the board. It's not something that you've gotten into as a paycheck. I would say for a lot of people. It's a passion. It's something it was as cliché as it is. It's a calling whatever it is right. Guys have been sacrificing for this job forever. When you go back to the war years, you go back to the 50 6070s. And even before that, conditions were terrible, overworked, they were going to fires,

they were firemen. Like, it was a different time. And yet they always gave back to it, these guys would work. 14, you know, they'd work at 1014 or something right? A 10 hour day or 14 hour night right back before 20 fours and all that they'd go home and they'd have to rest for a day and a half before they came back to the fire like these guys would get their butts kicked and their their days off from the firehouse. We're all about recuperation report from engine company add to that incredible book, right by Dennis Smith. And it documents that lifestyle, right? Like we've always given back to this job, the fire service is not one of those jobs or careers that can give, it's going to give you so very much. But you have to give yourself to it too. And I think there's this balance. And I'm not like James, I know you're very educated in all of this and scheduling and, and just all of the stuff that I'm not, right. And what I love about this and for you to have for you and I'd have this back and forth, is I think though in a way too, we've lost track of and maybe we should, maybe it's not what it used to be. But we also have to get back to this job too. And I don't know if that message is getting lost a little bit. Because what I'm finding not just in the fire service, but in life in general, is we're more concerned about ourselves today than the guy sitting next to us. And when we start focusing on the individual, not the whole, there's a problem. Now there's a fine balance, right. And sometimes you have to folk, you got to be good in your individual life to be good in a whole life, right. So if you're not good at home, if you're not good in your career, you're not good on your own ground that you stand on, you're not going to be much good for other people. But I think today in the fire service, we've become so focused on our individual needs and wants that we've lost track that we have to give back a little bit. Now. Anybody can argue that and say, Well, why should you have to accountants don't give back lawyers don't give back like, and that's fine. And we can have that conversation. But the fire service has always been built on that. We always go above and beyond. I mean, look at 911, right, September 11, how many extra companies were saddled up because it was shift change. And how many extra guys jumped on the rig to go they didn't have to, they weren't being compensated, they didn't think to themselves like I shouldn't get on the truck. It's not my shift now and I might not get paid for this. The it's a calling it's a duty. And so like I think we've lost track of some of that. And I think it's just how we've grown as an individual as a society as what we're taught. We're so focused on ourselves today, that we don't focus on the mission, or the greater good. As much as we care about our own shit today. And I think that's a problem. Now, I don't know. And I would love to I'd love for you to push back on that or talk to me about this, but I don't know what your thoughts are. But as Yeah, do we need to do a better job in the fire service career volunteer taking care of our own Hunter percent, I'm not going to disagree with that. I agree. There's so much more we could do. And if we had good leaders, strong leadership, good administrations, good municipal officials, mayors, councils, whatever it is, right? If we had good solid foundation people, but people have always extorted the fire service, people have always taken advantage of the fire service, because we are known to do whatever we have to do anytime of the day. And so they take advantage of that people take advantage of that. So how do we respond, we have to protect ourselves, we have to do better for ourselves. But there still has to be some type of give back and understanding that this job was built on that foundation. I don't know if you agree or disagree with me. But that's kind of like my point of view. I don't know thoughts.

J

James Geering 20:43

So you and I surround ourselves with the people that do give back. And of course, there are other elements. But I would ask you this. How many firefighter funerals have you been to? A lot? How many plumber funerals? Have you been to that many? How many accountant fire fire makers count for how many counting funerals? Have you been you know what I'm saying. So this is the thing. This is this is my barometer, I do a PhD. It's called the 343 hero challenge



every year Orange County guys put it on. And it's obviously a nod to the 343 men that we lost the 911. But it's a fundraiser as well, it's a big fitness competition. The first year I did it, I put the six names of the people I'd lost on my back that made me start this podcast. Last year, I haven't even collated the names for this year yet. But last year, I had 66 names on my back. And it was only in six years between those two. So this is my thing. There is a lot of selflessness in the fire service, depending on your circle, I'll give you a perfect example. I don't know if this was the same for you. For me, I spent a lot of my personal money and so many vacation days, going to extrication training, and educating myself and all these things, airway training all these things. So there's a lot of people I think that do go way above and beyond, you know, they take extra EMS classes, fire classes, go to conferences, etc. So that but then, of course, trust me my last apartment, especially, I have also worked around people that there when I first went to the last place I worked at one of the most heroic people that they admire that just retired, said, All you got to do is put your gear on the rig and work your 24 meaning basically do the bare minimum. And that was one of their heroes, and unlike this is disgusting. So I totally understand that to what my conversation though is the the work environment to allow people to thrive versus to fail. And if you look at the way that we work today in a career department, especially if you're in a urban suburban busy department, and then you compare that to the Special Operations, Special Forces, your favorite sports star, whatever, it couldn't be further from the truth. So we talk about it's for them, you know, people are selflessly wanting to perform at the highest level. But we have devolved to the point where our working environment not only makes us much worse firefighters and paramedics, because we're so sleep deprived and burn out. But also, no one can tell me that they have all these firefighter friends that have this incredible retirement and they're normally dying in their 90s and hundreds now that that figure of five years after they retire seems to be pretty universal. So that's my thing separating those two, absolutely, we need to forge ownership back into the fire service. And that sense of, as you said, for for the team, not just for the individual, but for a team to thrive, saps, Navy SEALs, etc. And I've had all of them on my show. They have the tools, the rest and recovery to be able to to perform at the highest level. So that's, that's where I would separate those two.



23:52

And that falls. I mean, I there would be no disagreement with me on that part. Right? I speaking of that, no, then I said that we need to be good as an individual, right? We need to take care of ourselves health, diet, exercise, sleep, like all of it. And the job doesn't promote a lot of that. Hands down, right? Pizza cigars, late nights, right? Like, it's just, you know, rinse wash, repeat, right? I mean, it's the it's the same thing. So yes, we do need to do a better job there. But we all have to be accountable for that as well. It's not just administration, it's the individuals to there's better. There's things we could do on a local level. That could that could promote that. It's do we want that? Right? I mean, it still comes down to the individual right departments could do much better municipalities. Cities can do much better on behalf of firefighters or any public servant for that matter. But it comes down to the individual you mentioned going to training out of pocket, right? Course you did, because you were in the job. And so that was it wasn't for the department, it was for you. The department reaps the benefit of you going I know guys all over this country that all they do on the weekends is go out and train and they do it To make sure they're better, it's a challenge for them. They're pushing themselves and holding themselves accountable to how good they can actually be at this job, which the public, and then the department reaps the benefit of that. Right. So I, there's just something about a firefighter, there's something about a police officer, there's something about military personnel, these are people that need it, they need it, they need that individual push and drive to be better I do that, listen, you know what real talk, a lot of this is selfish. For me, I need this. I need

this conversation. Today, I'm gonna get off this call after I don't know how long we're gonna go to 357 hours, whatever it is, I need this. It's that selfishness that I need to have in the funnel, right? But I look at this interaction. And what's going to come from this is not just the people that get to listen to this and form their own opinions and start conversation, or maybe push somebody to do something or whatever it is. But I also needed in my personal life, if I didn't get to do this today with you. I don't know what comes later. I could have I could be down and out. And I'd be like, Man, but today I had this conversation with James Geering. It was frickin awesome. It fires me up. And then that means I'm better for my family better for my wife. I'll take my family out to dinner tonight. I'm more dialed in because I got to do this. And I'm focused, like, I don't know how it all plays out. But it's okay to be selfish in some regards. And we need to hold ourselves accountable. And selfishness is some of that, right? As much as we talked about the fire service being a selfless career or selfless volunteer act, right. At the end of the day, we're still doing it for ourselves. A lot of it is all about what we get out of it.

 James Geering 26:39

Yeah, no, I agree completely. Well, you have hosted your own podcast for a long time. As we kind of discussed before I hit record. There's not much about you. So I want to start at the beginning of your journey. He talks about volunteerism, so obviously we'll get into that. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did, how many siblings,

 27:01

January 28 1977. I was born in Ridgewood, New Jersey. I have two older brothers. So I'm the youngest of three boys, mother and father amazing people. My parents stopped at me perfection. I was the last so I was the baby. They stopped me and, and so on. It was a great childhood in a middle upper class suburban neighborhood, grew up school, went to college. from college, I went into the family business, my father ran a bearing a ball bearing and power transmission company, and all types of heavy industry and so on. So I had worked there from when I was eight years old on up. And so I literally wore every hat in that company. I've spoke about this on my podcast many times. And it's fun to go down this road because I don't talk about it a lot. But when I do, it hits a lot of nerves with people. I had the opportunity to be a career fireman four times over, at least four times over. I passed on the job every single time and stayed with the family business. I felt that I owed it to my father for the upbringing that he gave me. I had a good life living a good life. You know, in my upbringing, we traveled we went on vacation. We skied in the winters we went to you know, the shore in the summer. He gave me a good life put me through college, I didn't have to incur any debt for schooling. He, they my parents took very good care of me. And I felt grateful. And I felt that I owed them. And so out of college and through college, I worked for the family business, like I said, since I was like eight years old. graduated college went right into the family business. And at that time, during college, I could have gotten hired twice as a career farm and my number came up on to two lists. I deferred it both times because I felt that if I didn't finish college, I would never finish it. I felt that I owed that to my parents. They paid for my education. So I did not pursue the career fire service. At that point. Now I wish I did. I was a volunteer fireman since I was 18 years old. I grew up in it. My father was a volunteer fireman, my two brothers are firemen. So surrounded brat My uncle is on the job of retired, you know. So like, we're surrounded by it. And it was a big part of our lifestyle growing up. But I didn't pursue it on the career end. Because I felt that I



owed it to my family to stay in the family business at least for a while. The intent was to get hired eventually, but as the family business moved on, you know, I came I was Tommy Boy right? So the movie Chris Farley like Tommy Boy, that was me, man. I was big Tom Callahan son. I was that fat dumb ass who was entitled and I came out of college, got a company car and a credit card and said Go make sales be a salesman. And I thought I was God's gift to the world and I was a piece of shit, man. I really was. It took me a long time to realize that and we'll get into all this but 2008 2009 the world dropped out. The economy dropped. My father told my brothers and I beat him for breakfast before work. met at breakfast. He said Listen, I have to lay off three people and see the youth Ray, are three of our longtime employees. Who am I keeping? You want to talk about a reality check, you want to talk about putting things in perspective, my father looked at me and said, You're gonna come in off the road, and you're going to learn this business if you want to stay here. And, and that's what I did. And so I gave up the company credit card and car came in, started picking up phones and picking up the phone and picking up the phone. From there, we grew the business 2008 2009 And we're not easy times for us. We grew the business. I became the vice president of operations, I ran the business. And through that time, I was still taking some tests. I even took some police tests. I don't say that very loudly.

 James Geering 30:41

I wasn't soundbite for this episode.

 30:44

I was a criminal justice major. So I went to school for that thinking I might become a police officer. And in fact, there were some opportunities there. But I always stuck with the family business, I felt that I owed it to my father to give back to what he gave for us. Is that right? I don't know. I often I found myself as time was ticking on. I was starting to resent it. I was starting to butt heads with my father I was looking at and I had zero ownership in this company. I was just an employee, but I was running the day to day. And it was consuming me I was working 1012 hour days, five or six days a week, working Saturdays and it just was consuming me took me away from my family. It was getting in the way of our marriage to the point where I made my wife quit her job and come work for me. So I would at least see her at the office. And that was our time. And it was crazy. And that's the life we lived for many years. And my kids were little at that time. And I'm I'm kind of regretful for some of that. I say I don't have a lot of regrets. But I feel like I I could have done better. We could have done better early on. But I think it's all part of growing. And so my father was looking to retire about five years ago, went through the process of looking at buying him out my brothers and I were going to buy the business make it a second generation company went through the whole process. And at the very end of the process, I got cold feet and pushed away from the table. some difficult things man, I people if they don't know what family businesses look like, they're not easy. They're very ugly. Or when you have a family business, typically you don't socialize with your family outside of work, because that's all you do is work with them. And so outside of of work, you don't typically have picnics with them on the weekends, typically don't hang out with them. And it it was getting in the way. And to put things in a real perspective. I'm the youngest of three boys, but I ran the business. So I had two older brothers who at many times resented me 10 times over for that, but I'm the operator. And that's how it had to be. We looked at purchasing the business. I got cold feet. My wife is an amazing human being. And we had a conversation

the night before I was supposed to sign some paperwork. And she knew I was struggling with it. She said to me, you know if it's only gonna get harder and and grander, more time, and what are you going to get out of it? And, and so we really had a heart to heart that night I went into work the next day I pushed away from the table said I wasn't ready. My father was not in a absolute hurry to retire. So we left it on the table. About three weeks later, we got a phone call from a competitor. Hey, heard some possibilities there. Let's have a conversation. Six months later, we sold the business done. I have not regretted the single day that we've sold the family business. I'm not. I didn't reap any reward. I didn't reap a paycheck from the sale. I was not an owner, I was an operator. But it gave me an out. It gave me my life back it gave me you know afternoons and nights at home with my kids. It gave me time with my wife again. It also allowed me to build National Fire Radio. And that to me and when I look at what I'm going to be known for I'm listen, I'm a technical sales, but I still work for the company that purchased us. So I still do that. And I travel a ton for them and I manage a very big large account for them. And I'm a technical salesman, you want to know anything about motors, pumps, bearings, conveyor belts, I'm your guy like that's, that's my life, right? I've lived that since I was eight years old. But man, the fire service is my passion. And when I turned 40 He was right before we started talking about before we sold the family business. I said to Terry, I said I was I was struggling with a lot of things. I had a lot of struggles around that time. And some of it was finding my own way. You know, when you run a family business, you have a lot of people that are dependent upon you. When your father and mother and your two brothers and their livelihood and their kids or their families depend on how you operate the family business. There's a lot of burden there. It's not just provide For my own wife and children, it's not providing for the whole family a lot. I felt like I was getting lost. I felt like it was getting muddy, I started having some resentment, I started pushing back a little bit, I found myself starting to get disconnected from it. And I came to realize that I wasn't doing enough for me. It was consuming me, but it was not my passion. It was my father's passion. And it took me a while to really figure that out. But when I did, at the time, I was doing some innovative marketing for our family business, using social media, and we were finding some growth from it. And I was starting to hack attention and a big, real big inspiration for me was Gary Vaynerchuk. Gary Vee. I don't know if you know Gary Vee is but if you if you listen to this podcast, you don't listen to him. A lot of people don't like him. And then the people are absolutely in love with him. I'm absolutely in love with him. And he was an inspiration for me to push myself to do something for me. And the follow my passion, the passion has always been the fire service. So it kind of circles back around. I did not pursue the career Avenue because I felt obligated to remain in the family business. But man do I know I should have been a career fireman. And man do I know I should have been you know riding trucks sleeping in fire houses and working in busy urban, like in a busy urban setting. I just that would have been for me, I think the fulfillment I needed. I just didn't have it. I still volunteer. I volunteer in a department that does 700 runs a year. I'm very active with them when I can be I travel a ton now. But I was I'm a chief I was a chief of that department one time and I love it. I absolutely love it. And I can't get enough. And if a fire dropped right now I'm running out the door, man, we're gonna reschedule this. I mean, that's that's how much like passion I have for going to fires I love going to work. I love being able to put gloves on and have a tool in my hand. Like I just love it. There's so much about that, that I just am so passionate about. So I knew that the fire service my passion, I was hacking social media for the Bering world for the family business. And I came to realize like this isn't happening in the fire service. There's not a lot of podcasts out there. You started around the same time, I believe, right? So 2020. So you're Yeah, you were a lot earlier than me. I'm sorry. That's right. So like, but there was not a lot out there that was focusing on the good of the fire service. But delivering the message on today's means. There's so much nonsense in the pipe that is stuck in a traditional value sense of how we share and spread the word about the fire service. But that's not where people are paying attention today. So if you want to be the guy, or the platform that

educates the people, you need to have their attention. And so I started seeing all these things coming into play. And so I said to my wife, I said, Terry, I want to do something for myself. She said good. What do you want to do? She's like, you need something, what do you want to do? I said, I think I think we could be the next fire engineering. And she goes, Excuse me, I said, I think I can build a platform that will be the content delivery mechanism in the American fire service. And she looked at me without hesitation and said, well then go do it. And that was about five and a half years ago, we started National Fire Radio. And like I said it started as a podcast. It was my way I always found myself James in the firehouse connecting the young and old. I love bullshit. I love stories. I love talking about the same fire 3700 times. I love driving back from Iran and pointing out houses, buildings, lots of trees that cars have been into and talk about those jobs with those kids in the back seat. I love the conversation of the job because it pushes the job forward. And so the podcast for me wasn't, it was a no brainer. I get to surround myself with incredible people and hear their stories. And then share them with people that want to hear them just like I do. Fuck yeah, bro. Let's go. Right. So that's how this whole thing started. But from there I started realizing very quickly there were so many holes in the traditional system that was in place. And it allowed us to start taking some real wild permissions and I'm not gonna lie, man, this thing has grown. It has been a downhill snowball and it is getting bigger and bigger. The opportunities the people that I consider friends were were pipe dreams five years ago for me of I wish I knew who that guy was. I'd love to shake his hand. Now I text him every day or we talk like I am so super happy with how this has gone but I'm not even close to like where I think we can go with this. And it's just, it's I've done so much for so many. And I don't mean that in a weird way like I don't. I love that about what I'm able to do. I did it with the family business. I do it with my family and now I get to do it with people in the American fire service. If I can give back man the message Jeez, I get I just got a, like a 12 page email last night from somebody that just



40:06

Hawkman like it hits, you know, it's like, you know, you do some mental health episodes and the amount of people that reach out. And thank you for talking about it talking about a topic talking about this talking about that, getting people fired up to go back to work, because their job sucks. And they listen to the national fire pot National Fire Radio Podcast every morning on the way to work, because it just fires them up to know there's like minded people out there. I mean, I can't even begin to tell you how grateful I am. But man has it become like such an ownership position. Now for me, I feel so responsible for continuing to do this. Like, I feel like I can't step away from this now. Because I think that we've rooted ourselves where people truly believe in what we're doing and the words that we share, and the guests that we share with our listeners, there's a tremendous amount of trust that goes into what we do. And we've been transparent from day one and never have I told a different story never have I embellished distort my maybe a few embellishments along the way. But yeah, you know, that's part of the gig, right? But, but people believe who they who I am is who I am. And the amount of support and outpouring we get is unbelievable. And I am so forever grateful. And we've only scratched the surface on this thing, man. And it has it has grown leaps and bounds. And I'm just eternally grateful. But that's a little bit of the backstory that got me to where I am today. But man, I wouldn't change any of it. You know, when you when people talk about regret, they look back, you know, I know I should have been a career fireman, I could have been, you know, in full transparency. That was 2023 years, I'd be 2324 years in right now. On the Job.




 James Geering 41:44

Let me ask you this financial Yeah, would you be in a better or worse place? If you'd been a career firefighter,

 41:50

I probably would have been in a much better place as a career. Yeah, because I still could have worked for the family business, and pulled a career and in the fire service, which in the Northeast does not pay back at all. And then on top of that, 24 years in, I probably be a line officer or chief find out and then take it from there. You walk out the door and I have a pension. What do I have in the private sector for one that I put into? Right? Not that you don't put in the attention, but like, it's different. It's different. It's a different system. You know what I'm saying? And so yeah, would I have been? Did I sacrifice for the family business? Yeah, I didn't. I didn't think I did. But I know I have. I know that. It's, it's been challenging for my family. It's been challenging for my wife. It's been challenging for our marriage at times, you know, time allocation, money, all of it. Everybody deals with that stuff. There's no doubt, right? But man, I was so frickin loyal to a family business that I just pulled a paycheck front and nothing more, other than aggravation and missing my family and so on. And I love my father that much. He is my everything. I do a program called Bridging the Gap. And I talked about, I do it for conferences and keynotes and things like that. And the opening slide for it is a picture of me and my father. And he is my he's my go to. And he still is and as much as I said, resent him was building along the way. Resentment would never trump the love I have for that guy. Or, or the sacrifices I made for him. Were my choices. And I don't regret that and I never will, you know, it was the ability to have his legacy live on build the name of the family business, you know, and let him have his swan song to be able to get out. And, and that was important to me. And did I suffer from that or because of that? Probably. But it's okay. I got broad shoulders, you know, let's go.

 James Geering 43:46

I want to go all the way back to your early life and then we'll come back to some of the topics that we're going to unpack in a minute. You were a young lad growing up when your dad was a volunteer firefighter. Talk to me about that experience through a child's eyes. Fucking awesome

 44:00

bro. Chased fire trucks on my bicycle fire siren would blow the plectrum would go off in the house. You know this was back then it was a sleepy suburban neighborhood. They're probably going to 150 calls the year. Just fire. They didn't do medical, right. They're doing 150 calls a year and out of 150 147 of them are legit calls of service. Right? It was different back then. We used to chase the fire trucks on our bikes. We used to get yelled at by the fire chiefs all the time to go home like all that shit. My father shared the firehouse with us but he shared it to a to an extent. Me I bring my kids to the firehouse whenever they want to go. My youngest now is 15 I think she's getting into it. It's my daughter Lily. I've never pressured I have four. So to really get crazy. You're I have four kids. Two are my stepkids and two are my own with my wife. My two stepkids are 29 and 27. My wife had them very young. They've been my stepkids. I've

been in their life since they were five and six. So I've been around a very long time. They're my I just consider them my kids. They both are moved out, live out, you know of the home. And then I have Paige and Lily and pages 16. She's going to be a junior in high school, and Lily is a freshman. None of my kids pursued the fire service I never forced them to it was always very prevalent in our home. They know how important it is to me. And now of course, with National Fire Radio, they know how important it is to me for sure. But the volunteer fire service has always been near and dear to my heart. And I think it's important to be a part of your community that you live. I think too many people pull away from civic mindedness. Now, I did an episode on that not too long ago. And I think that's a topic that needs to be explored. But my daughter, Lily is starting to show some interest, I don't know if she's going to pursue it or not, she can at 16 as a junior firefighter, if she wants to do that. I'm not forcing them in any regard. Nor would I because I hold it to such a high standard, that I worry that if they do it, and they don't do it in my the way I think it needs to be done. There's going to be problems and I don't want that. So if if, you know Lily knows that if she wants to do it, she has to do it her way. But she has to do it. And it's not a hobby, if you will, it is you have to go all in. And as long as she gives all into it. You know, however she chooses to do it is fine. But I don't know if she's going to or not. She's got a lot on her plate. She's a beautiful kid who's got plays volleyball, and she's super smart reads like you wouldn't believe voracious reader, and so on. So like, you know, I don't know, I don't know what that looks like. But for me as a kid. It's all I wanted. All I wanted to do, man, I the day I could become a firefighter was like the best day of my life. It really was. And it was everything I wanted it to be and more. It really was like I my first couple of years, man, it was the same six guys in the same engine. going out the door, the siren would the townwide siren system was winding down a word out the door. I mean, and this was a home response department and like we raced to get there, whether it was a car monoxide alarm at the same house 15 times over that month, or if it was, you know, a job out three windows on a rival Like, it didn't matter. It man that was so important to me. I don't think the kids have that today. I don't think they get that same excitement that I had that same buying that I had. I wish I could take what I had as a young kid in the volunteer fire service, and bottle that up and be able to share that with people because they just don't care guys don't even run a home response department guys don't even run into the firehouse anymore. They don't even run into the firehouse. They like strolling, and I'm like, Are you like what are we doing here? Right. Like we're, it's things have gotten so strewed in such a different way from what it was when I was there. And I'm not saying it's any worse or any better. What I'm saying is I think we can do better. But we could have done better back then too. But I was blinded by it. And I was so smitten over it. So in love with the volunteer firehouse in the upbringing I had there. My father kept us at arm's length. The firehouse for him was his place. And he didn't want his kids there all the time. That was Monday night drill nights after drill after they trained for a while right? They burned a house to the ground back then or whatever they did stretch lines, right? Lay out double threes put put water on the fire, they go back to the firehouse to clean up, then they play cards and drink beer until two in the morning. Why would he want his kids there? That was a men's club. It was it was it was his timeout from his job is family and everything. So he kept us at arm's length. We went to all the functions, we went to all those things, but we weren't invited in every single day like my kids are welcome with me anytime. And they know every single guy at the firehouse. They know every guy's name, they know their families, they you know, in all the guys know them. It's just a different level of buy in, but man being held at that arm's length, but then getting the nod Holy shit, James, I'm not kidding, man. Like it is a really impressionable time for me. And it was important to me. And I value that and I think that's why I still carry this unbelievable love, this unconditional love for my fire department for my upbringing in the volunteer fire service. And I think that's why it's important to be civic minded to give back to the community in which you're a part of all of that. And, and we need to do that.

 James Geering 49:28

Now you talk about the civic minded conversation, which I think is extremely important. I've heard I've had a lot of people on the show where the country they're from there is some sort of national service. It doesn't have to be military service. You know, it might be a community. Yes. Where I think there's a lot of gray area is the volunteer fire service. What I mean by that is there are areas of the United States is a vast country where absolutely it makes 100% sense. You know, you're a town of 200 You know, until maybe larger county your federal departments can get to you your rent. And that's why you have volunteers. On the other side of the conversation. It seems like there are some volunteer organizations now that are in very heavily populated suburban areas where one could argue why are there not career? Why are you not paying these volunteers to be there full time to respond to immediately from that station and deliver a higher level of service? And I just mean that not by the individual, but literally the time it takes to go from call to a response?

 50:29

Yeah. What? If you do the job, you do the job, right. Like when you when you think about the fire service, it's super unique, because I know incredible volunteer firemen that are on the top of their game that are in bought in 120%. And I know career firemen that sucks shit. It's like any career, right? It's like anything, there's good guys, there's bad guys, right? There's guys there for the right reasons. There's guys there for the wrong reasons. My concern becomes involved when departments bury their heads in the sand and don't want to look at realistic, realistic settings, if you will, right. You got to look at what your community looks like a lot of volunteer departments are going through manpower struggles, people don't volunteer like they used to, they don't have that ability to give back to the community, whether their time wise, they have no interest. They're focused on themselves, and they don't want to get whatever it is, right. Communities are struggling with volunteer fire services, but you have to look at ultimately, at the end of the day, the only thing that matters is the service in which is being provided to the residents that believe unconditionally, that you will be there to give them the very best that they deserve to have. And when we don't provide those services, we're falling down on it. And when we bullshit our town administrators, or fire commissioners, or whatever else that looks like and we're not painting an accurate picture about the service in which we're delivering, people don't care. They do not care who's coming. But they expect you to come and they expect you to do it proficiently and professionally. I don't care if your career volunteer does not matter. If it's Mrs. Smith in a town of 100, in the middle of Idaho, or it's some lady in downtown New York City, there's the same level of expectation for services when I call 911. Because my daughter's choking. I've been mugged or my house is on fire. There's the same level of expectation from 100 population of a 100 community to a population of 10 million. It's the same expectation, quick response, professional service, when we can't provide that. And it's not just volunteer departments. It's also career departments when we cannot provide that service to people that unconditionally believe in what we do. They don't care what we do until they need us. And we have to get over that. Oh my god, I so tired of the conversation about people don't appreciate who we are what we do shut up. They don't care. Just like you don't care about the garbage man until he doesn't pick up and then all of a sudden you bitch and moan that didn't pick up. Right. It's the same thing right into fire service. EMTs police officers were just another cog in the wheel, we're just a job. So like the average public doesn't put they say they put us on a pedestal bullshit defund the police and and put them on a pedestal, they only put them on a pedestal when it's convenient to the conversation, right. So like, we have to



get over that bullshit and believe in what our services are. And then we have to deliver them in the way in which our customer, the public believes it needs to be delivered. And when we fall down on that, that is where we have to be bigger and better to pick ourselves back up and address the situation with a career volunteer. And when we're dropping the ball and our services are not there, we're not giving somebody the level of experience they deserve, or the level of proficiency they deserve. We got to have a conversation. And we gotta have a real conversation. The problem is too many people want to bury their heads in the sand until it's too frickin late. You brought up firefighter funerals. How many did we go to that maybe could have been prevented?

**J** James Geering 54:14

I would argue most to be honest, I mean, even even you look at the line of duty deaths. You know, they got they got lost in a fire or they slipped off an aerial. You know, the one conversation is never brought in with that. The same with the police officer that you know, shot the teen reaching for his driving license, he thought he was going for a weapon is also you know, how, how tired was that person that's never in this conversation. So again, when we're looking at career, what is our ability to deliver service when you're asking these firefighter paramedics and EMTs to perform at this elite level after waking up from a dead sleep at 3am when they just got forced to do a 48 You know what I mean? It's not a poor me conversation at all. It's as you said, expectations when we are called upon on someone's worst day.

**o** 54:58

Yeah, I would agree The James 100%. I think that and that is where we can do more for us. And we need to do more for us. Majority of line of duty deaths are medical. And a lot of them are cardiac. How many departments have required physical fitness? Listen, I'm a big guy. I played high school sports. I played division one college lacrosse. Until I threw that away. That's a whole nother conversation. But even when I played and I was in the best shape my life I carried weight on me, right. I'm always been a big guy. But could I be in better shape today? Yes, my department had some standards and physicals that I had to do other than a standard, you know, physical and all that stuff every year, it'd be good. Accountability, right? If we're, if we're losing guys from heart attacks, and cardiac issues, and fitness issues on the fire ground, or we're not delivering a level of service that needs to be delivered. Because we're not on our best game. There's accountability there. We need to really start holding ourselves accountable and stop fucking pretending that this shit isn't happening.

**J** James Geering 56:06

Absolutely, yeah. And even then, you know, going back to let's say, You are the individual with the leather helmet and the moustache, but you're carrying 100 pounds. How into the job are you actually, you know, now I'm always very, very fair. As I said, right now, the environment sets us up for failure, which is why you get bigger uniforms every five years. You know, for a lot of people. It's not about shaming. And like you said, you don't have to have a six pack to be an incredible firefighter either, right? But if you're beating your chest and you've videoing yourself duck walking twice a week with a hose line in your hand, but you haven't owned your fitness, then again, you're missing the point.



56:46

I think self awareness, I think accountability. They've gone skewed man, I don't think people have a real good accurate picture of who they truly are anymore. I think years ago, man, we're going down. No, I just, I look at how many guys bullshit themselves. I look at how many people don't live a real lifestyle. They fool themselves. They lie to themselves. Not only are they lying to the people around them, but they're lying to themselves, and they believe their own bullshit. It is amazing how much people feed on their own bullshit. For what? Self awareness, guess what, not everybody can be a podcaster. Not everybody can be a fireman, not everybody can be a baker, a seamstress or a monorail driver. Not everybody can do it. Right. So like, be aware, can you do this job? If you're a volunteer? Can you volunteer at the level that your public expects you to volunteer at? Right, have some self awareness to understand that not everybody can do everything. Don't tell your kids, they can be LeBron James, if they can't be LeBron James, you know that at a very young age. So don't bullshit him. Stop telling your children, they can do everything and have real conversations with them about what they're really good at, and pursue that. I mean, there's just some things that you just can't do in life. And we've painted this crazy picture to make people believe that they could do anything they set their mind to do. Get the fuck out of here. It's good. It's not real talk. It sets people up for failure. And then when they can't get to where they want to be. And all long life they've been told, and it's been instilled in them that they can do anything you want. And then when they get there, and they can't, what happens? They crumble anxiety, right? It consumes them. I'm not who I'm supposed to be, I want it to be this, I can't do it. But I was always told I was the best I was. Let's have real conversation. So when it comes to the fire service, be aware, be aware what you're good at, be aware of what you're not good at, you can always better your position. But the job's not for everyone. Not everybody can put a mask on, enter a second floor window over a ground ladder under high heat and zero visibility and make a grab. Not everybody can do that. I haven't done that yet. I'd like to think that I have positioned myself to be able to do that when called upon if called upon to do that. I'd like to think that I can do that job because I've set myself up mentally and physically to do that job. I'd like to think I could do it. But I haven't been tested on the fire ground to pull a victim out of a second floor window by myself under a v s condition. Right? Not everybody has. But you like to think that the guy that's riding backwards can make that decision and be able to do that. So you have to be self aware. But if you know that you can't do that. You better pick up your game and be able to put yourself in that position. And if you can't, then maybe this job isn't for you.



James Geering 59:58

Amen. I've always said people I would be a horrendous accountant. I'm terrible with numbers.



1:00:05

Absolutely. Absolutely man. Like there's I, I couldn't be a pizza maker because I would just eat pizza all day. Like, there's no way but you have to be self aware. You have to you have to be able to have real conversations when you look in the mirror. I bullshitted myself for so long, bro. I'm telling you like, I speak about this stuff because I lived it. I wasn't happy with a lot of times of who I was I would I bravado and ego. I was a volunteer fire chief at 27 years old and I was the biggest asshole around

 James Geering 1:00:39

with Tony about because you talked about throwing away lacrosse. You talked about being an asshole working for that company. How did you get there? When you look back? What were the things that contributed to that element of the ego? And then what was the shift for you?

 1:00:55

You know, it's, it's funny. Life is humbling. It's understanding, you don't have all the answers. And that wasn't easy for me. And I don't know when that happened, per se. I drew a college lacrosse Division One got recruited to play division one lacrosse got there. Went to a couple of practices thought that I should be partying, hanging out with girls and staying out all night, instead of getting up at 5am. Doing suicides, Marathon runs and training year round for division one lacrosse, threw it away. I walked away from it. And to be honest with you, nobody gave a shit. You know, for me, it was like I used to worry about people and persona and all of that I used to I walked away from lacrosse and nobody was like, oh, man, you shouldn't walk away like nobody gave a shit. Right? Like, that's something I've never even explored that before until right this very second. But that's something right being concerned about, like, oh, do I need somebody to tell me to stay to change my ways, but nobody wanted to. So they probably saw that in me that this guy's not gonna stick around. He's not he's not all in on this. Right? So that was that. The family business. huge part of my life. I had very humble beginnings there. I came in full of ego, Tommy Boy, I knew that. I couldn't do any wrong. I mean, I was given every tool under the sun, and I still sucked at what I did. I'd rather take people to lunch and bullshit and go to titty bars and play golf, then, you know, sell, educate, make a community, right. And then when I got pulled into the family business, that was super humbling for me, my own father was gonna fire me. Family Business isn't gonna carry your fat ass anymore, you're out here, or you're going to pick up your game. And that was that was a big deciding factor for me. And I had to grow up very quick that day. And I had some real insight into what I had to do to do it. Right. And, and that was to give back to the family business to go all in to to give it the time and energy deserved and needed. And I did that. And from that I became very successful, excuse me at that job, and grew a reputation in an industry very much like the fire service where it's built on older dudes. You know, I mean, how many people know about ball bearings and power transmission equipment, and I'm 46 years old today. But when I was 36, and 26, like I was a young kid in this industry that didn't have young kids in it. And I'm a technical salesman. I mean, just this week, I did a I was down in Virginia doing a big conveyor belt job with installers and like all this stuff, like people have no concept of what I do outside of NFR. The people that know me, they have no idea. You know, it's this whole other lifestyle that I live, but you know, so that was a humbling time for me to have to learn the job. And then I think when we looked at buying the business, and I pushed away from the business, I think I've only become a better human being in the last six years. I think my 20s I was young fire chief. I was assistant chief for from 24 to 27. I was chief at 27. I had two stepkids at the time. And my wife and I had gotten married, had Paige right away after we were married. And then 14 months later Lily was here. So my two youngest are only 14 months apart. So Terry, I mean the five Volunteer Fire Service my life outside of work and family and even family I've put on the backburner so much because I was just giving back so much. People know that man, a volunteer firefighter is not easy. You know, you climb up the rank and you do the job correctly. It's a full time job, and it consumed me. It consumed me as an assistant chief. It consumed me as the chief. The chief term is a three year term. I stepped down after one year and people

couldn't believe it. I stepped down at 20 at the end of my 27 years old I stepped down after one year as chief I worked so hard to get to her and I was chief for one year and I backed and I stepped down. I stepped down because I had a newborn at home I had another kid on the way and my wife was ready to fly can kill me. And I finally I finally matured to understand that I needed to put my family first and I did that. And I stepped down and put the fire service second, and, and so on. But the fire service has always been very prevalent in my life. And you know, and I don't regret any of that I don't regret the decisions I made or how I acted or responded. But man, did I grow up, you know, perfect story, James, I'm sitting in the meeting couple years ago. And I'm now like the voice of reason, in the firehouse, which is just hilarious to me, because I used to be the hot headed. Let's go get out of my way, type guy. And now I'm like, I sit back and take it all in and so on. It's just funny, man, I'm so different today than I was yesterday, let alone 510 20 years ago. And one of the young kids at the meetings like I don't understand this. He's like, I hear all these stories about you when you were young. And he's like, and you would have just said, Go do it. Baba, bah. Now you sit back and you analyze the conversation, bah, bah, bah. He's like, cool. Like, why did you become this way? Long ago, because I matured man, I grew up like I, I'm interested in a bigger picture. Now. I'm willing to talk more, I'm willing to put it on the table. I mean, there's a lot of things said over the last hour and five minutes in this podcast right now. That I don't know, it's opening a real insight into who I am. And it takes humility. And I would never have spoken like this. Five years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years, no fucking way. Man, I would have protected all of my stories and sanctity and not let anybody in. And today I've come to realize that the more you let in, and the more you give out, the better you are, I sleep better at night, I can look at myself in the mirror, I have a better marriage, a better relationship with my family, I have a better relationship with the fire service. And it's all because I've had to get there. And it's just taken time. And I think so much in this world today is the immediacy of everything. And the one thing that we lack, we talked about self awareness, right? We didn't really go into accountability yet, but we sort of did. The other thing is patience, man. Like, I just nobody's patient anymore. nobody's willing to let it ride. nobody's willing to try something out to the end. Everybody wants it now. Everybody needs change. Now. Everybody wants now and nothing is done now. Nothing. But that's what we all know you want an answer? Now? Nobody argues Nobody argues about who won the 82 World Series because we just look it up on our phone. Now. You know, in bars, we used to have conversations all the time. And bus chops about who knew the most knowledge about pop culture and sports and all that shit. We don't have those conversations anymore. Oh, it's right here. Oh, let me look it up the fucking guy rich. There's always one guy in a group that ruins it for everybody. You tried to get a conversation going and all sudden he's like, Oh, it was the Astros I'm like, fucking asshole. Like, we could have talked about this for 15 minutes. But you just ruined it. Because the immediacy of answers. It's the world in which we live. I'm not vilifying it. I'm just saying there's something in the art of conversation. There's something in the art of humility, and camaraderie, and the storytelling, and that all matters. And that's why we're here today, bro. I mean, that's what this is, I hope somebody gets something out of this. I hope something positive comes from this conversation. And if me putting my stuff on the table, and me giving people an insight into my life, maybe it touches somebody else, something Kentucky some kid that was like shit, I work for family business, I'm going through the same shit. Like, there's that connection. You never know what the connection can be. But if you're not willing to talk, and you're not willing to educate, you're not willing to put yourself out there and let your guard down just a little bit. People know who I am. Because I tell them who I am. There's no smoke and mirrors here. You know what I mean? There's a few things that I obviously don't talk about. But like, overall, I'm an open book, man. You know, I don't know. I think it goes to the emails I get from people, the people that can relate to the podcast, the shows to the guests. And I feel that that's an important insight for me. And so I answer everybody back might take me a little while, but I tried to get back to every single DM, an email

I get because somewhere we struck a chord with somebody somewhere, something resonated with them. And it's my duty and obligation to appreciate them at least taking the time out of their life to reach out to me because I hit them with something. I don't know.

J

James Geering 1:09:30

I think one of the things that's really emerged after the last few years and sadly, it's taken a huge amount of suicides to really kind of extrapolate this, but is that courageous vulnerability, and I've had so many revered people from all professions, you know, police and fire but also, you know, saps and seals and on here sometimes in tears, talking about the things that really bothered them. And if you think about when we first came on the job, I mean, you you came on a little bit before me, I think I was 26 when I joined the fire service You know, there was adoration for that salty guy. Basically the giant fucking dickhead in the station. Oh my God, he's amazing. Don't Don't you know, don't address him when he's in this mood, oh, he's crazy. But oh my god, you know, it's a fire legend. And you realize now in 2023, that guy is actually in crisis, that guy is hurting. That's why he's a giant dick, you don't have to be addict to be a good firefighter. So what is really encouraging to me, and it's exactly what you've done in this conversation is the vulnerability, the honesty, like this, this one section of Instagram, that ridicules everyone else's fire helmets, or the way they ran their fire scene or whatever. And this projection of perfection themselves as a fire service is so you know, fictional. And then you have the real firefighters would be like, dude, let me tell you about time I fucked up on the fire. Like, you know, I'll give you an example. For my career. I was young, but my first fire and hire Lea Evan, there is a back of the house and there's a sports car in the back yard, it's on fire. And they're trying to kind of open the gate. So I give him a hand. I'm grabbing the top and, you know, young and fit and super energetic. And then the next thing I'm on my back with the entire fence on top of me. You know what I mean? Another time at a fire the tweaker had put porcelain tiles not only all over his house, but on the driveway to the moment the water starts flowing. It's like Disney on Ice and everyone's bust in us. These are the stories that this is a reality of a fire scenes organized chaos. You know, so I think this is so important today is to be vulnerable. And be honest, like, you know that imposter syndrome that so many of us suffer with, you know, talk about these, these are real nice. Again, it's not a negative conversation. There's enough conversation about the love of the job if you're in the right places with the right people. For the old Gary,

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it's scary to show insecurity. Listen, you're talking to a guy right now. What night was that Monday night, Monday night. I almost took my finger off the jersey Jaws of Life. I went to the ER, I went to the ER we had a 3am pin job car into a tree no breaking guy probably fell asleep. Heavy entrapment steering column dashboards up on his chest, his foot, his feet or his right foot heavily impaled under the dashboard up in an under the dash, our intendment and extrication to get the guy out. This was a hell of a pin. We haven't had a hit like this in a long time. I'm leaning through the back door and I'm leaning. I'm in the past the rear door on the driver's side with my body across and then up the center console. I pushed the steering column and dashboard off of his chest. I was worried he had like crushed syndrome. I was worried once I pushed it off of them that he was just gonna coat on us right away. He was conscious and alert throughout the whole thing until they finally met him up so we could get them out at the very end. Roll that we pushed the dash off and now we're working his feet. Cars just peeling

apart. Plastic shit everything. We're in there with another RAM we're in there with salsals We're in there with a large spreader and other guys operating a large spreader from the passenger side door. But I'm guiding it in underneath the guy's feet to spread and open up the gap to get his foot out. We cut the saddle strap on the on the dashboard with the saws off because the only tool that we get in there now I'm working halfway blind with my fucking hands and gloved hands. And I'm guiding the tool in and as we're putting the spreader into the position. I didn't have clear line of sight of my hands, I got 1000 things going on. I'm literally six inches from the guy, right, who's moaning and groaning and bleeding and fucking absolute mess. And my hand went in between the two tips and the pressure on my glove. I screamed like I've never screamed before. And thankfully, the guy stopped on the tool. And I was I could not get my finger out. He had a let off on the tool. I'm telling another eighth of an inch my finger would have split wide open and would have crushed it in the glove. And I have this massive blood blister that runs down the length of my hand and a deep like bruising and all that shit on the bone. I didn't break the finger. But man, you want to talk about throbbing for two days. Like you know it was legit. But I almost 29 years in the fire service. I almost lost my fucking finger. Like what? It happens. It happens. Right? But let's talk about it. So it does happen again. I could bury that story. I screamed like a bitch because I thought my finger was coming off my glove. The guys guys were like, I've never heard you scream like that. And I'm like, because I thought I was losing my finger man. Oh, lose my finger. You know for what? Right? So like when you think about that. That's just a small little story. But that's happened in my career. 1000 times over. If this happened 20 years ago, I wouldn't talk about it again because I feel like I made a mistake or I did something wrong. Now I want to talk about it so I can educate the next guy. That's that humility. The insecurity of doing something wrong and being criticize guys don't take initiative anymore because they're worried that they're going to be chastised. They're worried that the shitty leaders we have, or the shitty people that we surround ourselves with that think they're fucking better than they are. You make an issue, you make an error on something you take initiative on. And these guys ride giraffes. Meanwhile, these guys won't take initiative. It's crazy. So we need to we need to allow ourselves to make mistakes. Understand that we're allowed to make mistakes, and we learn from them. If we're not making mistakes, you're never going to learn you're never going to grow. You do everything right the first time? Nobody does. Nobody does. So only and you know what? Anybody that turns around and pushes back against you because something didn't go right. Or you didn't do it right the first time out of the gate, if they push for I promise you they're glasshouses more brutal than yours, brother. I promise you, you know what I'm saying?

J

### James Geering 1:15:53

Absolutely. Well, it kind of makes me think of something I've discussed a couple of times here. When you think about how a lot of us are trained, and it obviously depends on the CADRE is actually teaching you at that point, whether it's in fire school, whether it's EMT, or medic, but a lot of times, especially once you're hired, and you're doing almost like kind of box check in training. It's exactly that. Oh, excellent. You went into the broom building, you made a couple of right hand searches, you know, you found the dummy. And then the other guy put the power out high five. And high fives. Yeah, absolutely. And then it's the same with as a paramedic. So you know, you are a diligent student, you know, you study your drugs, you study your, your EKGs, and your electric therapies and everything else, and you have a mega code, and you address the Brady and you address the full arrest. And, you know, congratulations, they've come back. And then you get into the real world, and you're an absolute shit magnet black cloud like I've been, and you never save a human being in 14 years. Yeah, that's setting you up for failure. 100%, what we need to layer on to this is, it goes wrong. Whether it's, you know,



another scenario slap into the first one and I love one of my guests was talking about like, first, you know, what, before you can run brand new recruits, teach them how to advance hose, let them put the pallet out, but then had, you know, alternative scenarios, okay, this happened, you know, you the door just closed behind you now you're separated from your partner, whatever it is. And now you're understanding you kind of teaching that it's usually not going to go right, I've had codes that went beautifully. And I've codes that are an absolute shitshow had a quadriplegic, you couldn't even compress his chest because he'd been acquired since he was 18. And now it was 50. It was like the quarter panel of a car, and an emesis coming out constantly a blood fucking fountain from his airway. They don't teach that in med school, you know, like, you literally can't do airway or compressions. So you know, these scenarios happen. And I think that, you know, with all the best intentions were taught well, but understanding to fold in that failure in your training, trying to overcome trying to use innovation, and sometimes saying, yeah, they died, because that's what happens in the real world, you do everything right, and they still fucking die. You know, I think that's an important part of the education. So you don't have this facade of yeah, you just do compressions you do, you know, you defibrillator twice, and they're gonna get up, they're gonna hug you, and then I'll bring you a cake to the station the next day, because zero saves in 14 career for me, you know, and it's just, it's just, you know, unlucky or lucky, depending on where you are, maybe someone else doesn't have to deal with all that fucking shit. And they just put it on me. But, you know, this is the reality that you know, it is, you know, you go to a fire, and you know, you've you've been training and the baby's in there, and you go in there, and like you said, when a surgeon, you come up with the baby, and everyone high fives, you know, the baby fucking died. You didn't get there in time and they died. Now we've got to have those conversations, too.



1:18:50

It's setting up from the framework. We talked about it before, don't tell your kids, they can do something if you don't think they can do it. You can't be everything life isn't sunshine and rainbows. Not everybody gets a fucking lollipop. Right? Like, I mean that but I mean it in the in the most positive way. Because when we set up a false environment, or we set up a false upbringing, whether it's in childhood, or probationary firefighters or paramedics, we can give you all the tools in the world. Shit still goes wrong. Understand that. It's the same thing with upbringing of your children. I can give you all the tools in the world. But some kids gonna go down the road and smoke crack. Some kids gonna end up in jail. Some kids are going to have children out of wedlock, whatever the situation. You can give all the tools but shit goes sideways. So let's have that conversation about when it goes sideways. How do we cope? How do we deal and that I think is important. You brought up suicide before you talked about mental health. I know you talk a lot about mental health on your podcast and I kudos to you for that because I know Oh, that that is such a powerful topic that's getting more and more traction, which is beautiful. It needs to be talked about more and more, we need to give our people the tools and understanding that it's okay. It's okay to struggle. It's okay. You're not alone. I fucking struggle all the time, bro. I got my own struggles, you got your struggles? Like, it's just how do you carry them and how we cope with them. And to provide tools or the ability to open conversation to know you're not alone. Those are just as important as those skills. We teach paramedics and firefighters to know that shits gonna go sideways, like your wife's going to leave you, your kids never going to talk to you again. You're gonna have an addiction. Things go sideways? How do we cope with it? How do we get back from it? How do we get you back from it? Those are the important topics. Let's talk about that. Let's instill that into our people. Let's open those conversations and let people know that it's okay when shit goes sideways. Nothing is perfect. Nothing, nothing goes the way it's supposed to be the most manicured lawn

will have a tree fall on it. The most engineered production motor in an f1 car will spring an oil leak. There's nothing perfect in this world. So let's talk about when it's not, because that's the reality conversation and stop painting this picture of sunshine and rainbows. I'm tired of it. It sets us up for failure. And I think that has a lot to do with why people find themselves in dark places these days, is because they have this expectation that they're supposed to be somewhere at some point in their life. I'm 50 years old, I should be financially secure. I'm 25 I should be married. I'm 30 I should have a mortgage says who? Who gives a fuck? Like who literally cares? What are you holding your expectations for who's having this expectation of you, your parents telling the fuck off? Your teachers. You're the guy sitting the guy riding next to you on the fire truck has a mortgage. And he's financially stable, but you're not. And yet he beats his wife. Like come on. Like, there's, there's so much of this back and forth. We got to get rid of this belief that like we're supposed to be at some point somewhere in our life. I don't fucking know what's next. For me, I'm 46 years old. My life has changed dramatically in the last five, six years with National Fire Radio, my career has changed my family changes every single day, we have to be able to roll with change, we have to be able to understand that life goes sideways, there is no plan, get rid of the plan. And just live life. Do well have morals, ethics, values hold people accountable, but more importantly, hold yourself accountable. I struggle with it. Everybody struggles with that. I'm not sitting here preaching. I'm sitting here talking about I live this shit day in and day out just like the guy or girl that's listening to this podcast, we all fucking live this. So let's have a real conversation. And not pretend that life is perfect. Because when we pretend that life is perfect, we tell each other everything is perfect. That's where we go down some really dark places. And we just don't need to go there doesn't need to get that form.

J

James Geering 1:23:22

absolutely beautifully said, Well, speaking of addressing a large amount of firefighters in the US and obviously beyond. One of my observations, I became somewhat of a fire gypsy started in the Miami area, then went to California then back to the Orlando area. And then volunteered in where I live just for a short time until I realized it was basically like a paramedic ride along it wasn't you know, wasn't really functioning as a member of the crew. But anyway, got a really unique perspective of the fire service. And I realized just how fragmented and siloed it actually is, you know, and there are some great departments that work really well accounting and see PDF D but there's a lot of places around there that won't even talk to their neighboring departments. For example, one of the observations I've made with my podcast is just simply the medium of podcasting. Not saying that this one is anything special, but the medium allows you to circumnavigate these barriers, these silos and disseminate these incredible stories and people and life's work to everyone that needs to hear it whether they're in the union or not in the union, you know, whether they subscribe to this magazine, or don't they? That's all irrelevant. If you have you know, Wi Fi you can listen to your show my show. What is your perception of that? I mean, you know, we have a union for example, that a lot of people are in some on I was in for a long, long time. Did some good. Some areas that I'm very passionate about did fall call to be honest. So talk to me about you know, if you've observed that unification of all these departments through this unique New Media and that only came around about 10 years ago.

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I think what's really cool is the buy in is on the individual. Right? Like we, we put it out there,

but it's up to the individual to digest. There's plenty of guys that don't like me, there's plenty of people that don't care for what we do. They don't care for my personality, they don't believe that I should be talking, whatever whatever, whatever the case, I don't care. I don't care. I'm not doing that for them. I'm doing that I'm doing this is that selfish decision, I'm doing it for me. But through doing it for me, I've come to realize there's a lot of people that rely on and listen to what my perception is, or my ideas are. To watch. You said fragmented. It's such a good word for the fire service, right? You would think that in a in the United States of America, our fire service would be much more cohesive in all regards. And it's so far from the truth and not only nationally, but even locally, totally fragmented, 100%. There's no, there's no way to bring it all around, make it cohesive, I will say this, we can lose track of the fact that 90 Over 90% of the American fire service are rural communities that are providing a valued service to their residents in that community. And when farmer Ben's grain silo catches fire, it's not like going to a fire in downtown bolt, or New York City, right? It's a very different event. It's a community wide event, it's an event that could rock that community because people that a town of 400 all the Founding Fathers ride that fire truck, because they're protecting one another's property, their jobs, right, their livelihood, like this is what the American fire service is, we get lost a lot on social media, we get lost a lot in what we portray the fire service to be. Not everybody's riding, you know, five or six on an engine getting four engines, two trucks, two special services and four chiefs on a reported structural fire. It's just not happening. Right? Again, real conversation, right? So when we started looking at this and breaking it down a lot of what the American fire service is, and what the volunteer fire service was built on was literally neighbor helping neighbor, protecting your families and your livelihood. Right. And then the jobs obviously progressed. And you know, you have inner city urban settings and this and that, what I find where some of the disconnect comes is that there's not a lot of conversation. And for me, it's a challenge that I want to pursue more. But the only types of content that are out there for the fire service are typically urban and suburban, rural, or suburban urban tactics. And I think we need to do a better job at painting a realistic picture for the rural and suburban communities about what real life firefighting looks like, and not painting this picture of this is what it needs to be. Right. Like there's a level again, it goes to the expectation and delivery of services, right? So and that varies based upon where you live, because you only have x amount of resources, X amount of abilities, right, based upon where you live, the tools that are provided the people, you know, a rural town in Kentucky, is not going to get a foreign two in one response with 37. Guys, it's just not reality. And as much as we want to say they deserve the same service as somebody in New York City. It's impossible. You can't do that, right. But it has to be scalable, right? It has to be scalable. So anyway, so the the part of this though, and where I think we go wrong a lot of times is we're not painting an accurate picture for 100% of the fire service, I think we're taking the 10% of the fire service, people that go to fires regularly go to go to emergencies regularly, they are writing the they are they are creating the content around the fire service. And a lot of these kids and people from rural and suburban communities are looking to them for the strategies, tactics and ideas. And yet, it's painting kind of a non accurate picture of how they should be pursuing it in their communities, if you understand what I'm saying, when the people that have the permission to speak are the people that have the experience and abilities. And so you don't find a fire chief from rural Mississippi, typically lecturing, or educating, because he just doesn't have the pedigree to allow him to do that, if you will. And so his people when they have the ability to seek out information, it's typically coming from people that come from urban settings. And so that's where some of this fragmentation, fragmentation fray. Right? Excuse me. And, and so I think we need to do a better job of painting a realistic picture about operational tactics and abilities through a real lens of representation of what the American fire service is actually made up of. and not just from the top 10%. But it should be 100% incorporation, but allow the small town people to have a voice to to help educate their own. And I think that we need to do a better job at that. And

certainly a National Fire Radio, that's one of the things that I want to address because, you know, not everybody has a fire hydrant on every block. Not everybody has staffing. Not everybody has, you know, command staff, not everybody has functioning SCBA for every single one of their members. There are there are parts of this nation that don't have what a fire apparatus from the 60s that are their frontline apparatus, like real conversation, real conversation, right? We get so hung up on all of the it needs to be this way, look at this, look at that. Meanwhile, there's so many people that are struggling just with the very basics. And so the fragmentation of the fire service is very real. It's not just on the national level, it's also on a local level. And what I can say is this, you got to good where you are, be appreciative of that and stop being a douche. Because you could uproot and go somewhere else. And I promise you, it's 1000 times worse. It's not always greener somewhere else, work harder, where you are to make you and your department better. Don't jump ship because it's easy. That's the problem. It's easier to just jump ship and go somewhere else. Because you think it's better, I promise you, they have their problems too. And so we need to do a better job as a collective as the as the fire service as a whole. We need to do a better job at representing what the job truly is across the country, and then help one another out to fill those holes. And I think we need to do a better job at that. And frankly, like I feel that's kind of what our podcast doesn't weigh. Right. It's like we break it down. And I like to think I get so much feedback from people from an urban setting to the most rural communities and everything in between. We check all the bullshit out the door. I talked about the job on National Fire Radio, we talked about the job. The job is career volunteer, and I have guys all the time. Fine. Fucking volunteer this bah bah, bah, bah. I'm like, great. Okay, I listen. Don't listen. Don't listen to the content don't don't like the fact that people spend their valuable time critiquing what we do at times is humorous to me at best. People are willing to spend their time tearing other people down. Are what? Like, what that into a rational conversation? Right? I feel sorry for them. I feel sorry for them.

 James Geering 1:32:41

Have you ever seen the History Channel documentary into the fire?

 1:32:47

Yeah, years ago, though? I don't I don't know if I recall. I can't recall it. But I know when the History Channel came out with that? I do. Yeah, I did. For sure. You're gonna make me watch it.

 James Geering 1:32:57

Watch it again, I think it was the firefighters fund if I've got that right was behind it. But there's this amazing moment. And you have it's a beautiful documentary. And so I don't even know if you can find it anymore. It's almost like, you know, video version of our print. But I have the DVD somewhere at home. But they covered I think there was there was definitely career firefighters, I think from DC. There was I think paid on call. And then there was a volunteer. And there's this one guy kind of like you're talking about out in rural wherever, you know, they're having chicken dinners to raise money to try and get the fire engine. But this guy said this is the volunteer. He said, It doesn't matter if your career or volunteer. Every time you cross the threshold of a burning building, you're making the same sacrifice. And I think his point was, you know, sometimes you find that baby, you find that person you come out, you know, you're on

the front cover of the newspaper, he said, but every single time a firefighter goes into a burning building, whether they're paid or not. They're making the same sacrifice. And that, to me was the most beautiful way of making people realize it doesn't matter whether you have a paycheck now, as you said, your standards, your training, absolutely, that's part of it. But if you're paid or not paid, if you're if you're willing to sacrifice your life to go and look for someone you're doing the exact same job doesn't matter what your pay stub says your title is or which country you're in.



1:34:23

Yeah. Yeah. You know, and it's the same regard, regardless of what your title is. There's expectations. So, you know, it it's such a unique beast, when you break it all down the fire service, right? There's so you know, fragmentation. I mean, it's it's every lane of the fire service. There's, it's fragmented, right? But do we focus on that? Or do we focus on the good and I also believe that we focus way be too much on the negative because it's easier. Positivity takes work, change, promote one another takes work, checking your ego at the door to promote somebody else takes work takes character, right? Or it's a lot easier to jump on a bandwagon to bust balls to the point that you become an asshole. And you're not busting balls anymore. There's a lot to this, right? I think, again, the individual, we have to own who we are. Who do you want to be? Who do you Who do you want to be? It's not even what people think of you. It's what you think of yourself. But I promise you this if you think of yourself as an incredible person, but the people around you look at you like you're a piece of shit. You better change your mirror. You know what I'm saying?



James Geering 1:35:57

Absolutely. Well, another another thing that I've observed in this whole gypsy thing, so I was trained in Orlando, so East Coast and it was funny because our minimum standards you know, you start your ladder throw is you know, you carry the ladder to the to the wall, you lay it flat and you walk up the rungs, then you do the raising it from the side, which you know, later on, I realized that that doesn't seem to make a lot of sense. And then you do the big Flippity flu, and then it goes into the building, you know, and then I go out west. And I look at how they're throwing I'm like, oh shit, I have a huge learning curve, because this is a department that's known for cutting about a third of every probationary class if you don't meet it, you don't meet it so learn how to spike a ladder and then oh my god, this makes so much more sense. You know, you lift it this way you throw it on a shoulder now you can throw it anywhere where there's a car in the way or it's an alleyway you're not flipping it around you get it up in the window and then you just frickin climate and then vertical ventilation out west so then I go back east oh we don't get on the roof here are buildings a lightweight construction that I'm like, Huh? They believe this like the fucking gospel but when you've been out west actually cutting when you've been on the hose line that day and the truck opens a roof and you're like, oh my god, I can see I can stand up there's the fire. Oh, now it's out. And then you realize that the guys that now you're training with not only does it make no sense because if you want to create a chimney you cut a hole in the roof and all the smoke and fire goes out. But also you're putting three companies of people under that roof that you're saying is so dangerous. So this is the other thing too there are fairy tales in the fire service that completely unfounded told by people that have no fucking idea because they've never actually done the thing that believe it like the gospel, which then creates this ridiculous in a holier than thou mentality when actually

when you're exposed and you go try these different tactics or you know, whatever it is that you're opposed to. A lot of times you come away go Hmm, that that actually that does work. Now, I don't want to hang out on that roof when it's burning Once we cut the hole and get the fuck off, but that was amazing. Look how quickly it went out. You know, people laughing about the tarps over a car fire. I've never saved the car in my life. It's a big fucking Class B dumpster is what we're actually fighting. So I don't know what metals you're gonna get for putting out that pass out. But to me if I can throw a tarp over it keep my you know engine full of water for a real fire. Fucking let's do it. You know? So it's, that's one thing I've observed just having this kind of gypsy lens is that there is folklore that so unfounded, that creates that? Oh, these fucking cowboys over here rather than going, huh? There's a rural department over here that actually is doing things really well that might work here in New York, LA, whatever, if we had the humility to just listen to them and maybe try it.



1:38:50

No, it's really cool. I'm gonna give a little bit of plug here but they deserve it. Elkhart brass, they just came out with a YouTube a couple of YouTube videos where they took a bunch of subject matter experts, if you will, in hose and nozzle, work in the United States big names, and took them overseas with them, and provided a opportunity for a share between US and Europe, about strategies and tactics about moving water moving hosts. And obviously like you and your leather fire helmet and Euro helmet conversation. There are incredible differences in regards to how we strike how we fight structural fires between Europe and the United States. If you haven't watched it, it's on YouTube. I'm gonna give them a plug because go watch it. It's pretty interesting to see it. There's a lot of give and take where you think the Europeans are further along and some of their ideas it has to do with building construction for them is very different than ours and all these different things of how they fight fires and why they use high pressure and smaller ly all that stuff. But the point is this though to there was methodology also about a unit The states that some of the other guys from different countries were interested in. Also, they talked about the difference between extinguishment and cooling. And all these different things. My point of this is, is that they checked the folklore at the door and put it to test. When you talked about a job, quote unquote, gypsy firefighter, I think it's a funny term, but like, I think everybody needs to get out of the cocoon there and go try something somewhere else, or at least go educate yourself about how it's done elsewhere, there is more to this job than what's in your zip code. And when you limit your ability to grow, and you limit your ability to learn, you're not bringing anything to the table for your people. And I think that's one of the biggest things now more than ever, and you brought this up to now more than ever, we have management and leaders that haven't done what they preach, for us to do. We have more lack of experience than we've ever had before. And that goes from the backs up firefighter, right up through the chief of departments we have, we have officers career volunteer, that promote quickly to get moving up so they don't have to go to fires anymore. Like, start thinking about the rationale on that, right. So like this is this is the world in which we live. We shouldn't be living in a world where we're promoting one another to go learn more, do more, be better bring it back here, like and that's what's important. I think the sharing of ideas, the folklore, you bring up folklore exists, man, I have never, it is so commonplace to hear somebody tell a story and you turn around and be like, what, and then be like, that couldn't have happened. I'm telling you, I was told this. And I'm like, let's get to the bottom of it and see if that's actually out. And I can tell you like nine and a half out of 10 times. It's absolute bullshit. But man, do people believe the bullshit, man. You don't say there are incredible ideas, strategies, tactics, ways to go about leadership, there are people out in this industry that promote tremendous growth. There are there are incredible industry leaders, subject matter, subject matter experts, and



people all across the American fire service that are promoting this job to be better. They're bringing a lot to the table. There's it's unlimited the amount of names I can name, right. And it's cool because I get to know a lot of these people now. And I look at the impact they make. But the one thing they don't do is typically pigeonhole themselves into the only thing they know, when I go to a conference, and Moe Davis was speaking a District Chief out of Houston, Texas, who's got an incredible personality, and the guy is in love for the job, but more importantly, his people. After he's done lecturing, he sits in the front row and takes notes on the next guy. What does that tell you? Those people want more, be better, do better. And they're going to promote their people along the way. And that is what we need in this job more than ever. We need to promote one another. When we make each other better, we make the job better. And when the job is better. The people are better our own people and the public we serve.

 James Geering 1:43:07

Let me ask you this coming from the parallel paths of the volunteer fire service and the corporate world. I've had some interesting conversations with people in the business space talking about branding, you know, you had Bruna Seanie, you know, talking about the customer service thing and you know, almost like they were a business. I would argue if we are a business as try and model on Google, not Indian sweatshops, for example, but that's a whole other conversation. Sure, sure. But it's 2023. And specially the combination fire EMS departments, the number of times we like, why is there a fire engine on my medical call? You know, so there's, we seem to have done a horrible job at educating the public of who we are, when how we actually work. Not that oh, you work twice a year, and then you just pet the dog the whole time, but how we actually work. And also what we do you know, are you purely fire you fire EMS. So with you having not only the experience with the family business, but now growing National Fire Radio from zero to where you are now. Talk to me about how we brand the fire service and finally, educate the public on the American firefighter.

 1:44:16

Super important to let our customers know who we are. We got to be visible. We want our garage doors up. We want our trucks out. We want our people that our townspeople to see who we are, that we're a part of the fabric of the community. We want their children to stop in and fix their bike tire on the apron. We want people to stop in and ask to use the restroom. We want people to come and ask for directions. The problem is our own people don't want that anymore. We want to keep our firehouses close security reasons, right security reasons, right? We don't. I love when people pull up on the ramp of the firehouse to see who the first guy is to go out and engage them. Who's got the personality who wants to go out there and talk to the public nobody wants to talk to public anymore. That's part of the problem. We got to educate our people. First, we got to educate our people, for them to understand the importance of why we are here. The public 99% of time could give two shits about who we are, unless we directly affect an outcome in their family, deliver a child's save their mother put the fire out before extended to their home. Like these are things where people come down the pomp and circumstance, they come to the firehouse, and the guys stand there with the newborn baby or whatever. And the news crews are there and it looks great. And it's all that right. But it's smoke and mirrors, right. That's not the every day, the every day is educating our people to engage the public, be a part of the fabric, don't get hung up in your own shit. When you're at the firehouse, believe that you're there for the people. We are there for the people. I agree. I don't

agree with everything Brittany said. I don't. There's some things there that like, I just don't agree with. But I think the most important message is this. We are there to serve the public. We're not always going to fires, we're not always going to medical calls. But the service still needs to exist, the public needs to rely on the American fire service and EMS system to be the backbone. Regardless of what's happening. We'll be there. And we have to be sure that we maintain that line. And that's career volunteer from the smallest town participating on Main Streets parade on July 4, up to the biggest city arriving within four to six minutes for a medical call for difficulty breathing on the sidewalk. It's the same stuff. It's being a part of the fabric, it's being a part of the community, the neighborhood, whatever it is, you got to be a part of it. And that's being there for them on their terms, not ours. Again, stop getting caught up in our own shit, and get caught up in what the people want and expect from us. It's a thankless job, man. The problem is today, we've we've created that environment where everybody wants that ask slapper high five. If we go out and do a public detail, they want something in return. Or if we go and do this, we need this. Or if we're going to do this, we need this. Everything's become bargaining everything's become an issue. And so because of all of that, it's created this sense of entitlement that we're entitled to more but no, we were supposed to give. We're in a service to the community. Let's give back let's educate through the branding. The department needs to recognize the importance of sharing what they do, don't hide what you do. I remember sitting in in when social media first came out, people were like, we're gonna have social media. I just had a department the other day, get a load of this shit. A department the other day send me a direct message on Facebook asking me to take down a picture of one of their trucks because it violated their social media policy. What? I abide by your social media policy, like how does that like they don't even understand the rationale behind what they're doing or saying it doesn't even make sense. It's understanding you know, you look at guys, I got Eric Harris coming on. Eric Kurtz is a Pio of a department I believe in, I think it's Colorado, and he's got a YouTube channel and he's got a very successful YouTube channel. He's come on, I can't wait to talk to him. He's a Pio officer for his department, you ride along with them. He educates you about what they do. He creates this incredible environment for people to want to be a part of it. Chris Asri out of Virginia Beach, I had her on the podcast, she runs like they're cadet program. Virginia Beach has a big fire department. 400 600 people on the line, I think something like that, right? It's pretty good sized department. And she runs this volunteer Cadet Academy. But you know what that does for them, that creates the next generation of firefighter for them. They're finding kids that are looking for direction, they're finding these younger kids that need and want more, and they're finding the fire department in her. And the people that she surrounds herself with are creating the next generation of Rockstar firefighters for their own department. You want recruitment. That's how you do it, go into the community and invite them in and make them a part of you. You're gonna find people that are 14 16 18 years old, that buy into your department unconditionally, because you were there for them when their parents couldn't be. You were there for them when they were looking for some type of direction and you put their your foot up their ass to get them back in line at school, where they can't be a part of the cadet program anymore. And then all of a sudden, five years later, they test. They crushed the test and they come in and they already know what your department's about and how they're supposed to act and respond. It's fucking huge. Like those are the things that matter. I think we can't get caught up on vilifying social media. We can't vilify the public. I mean, I've seen guys treat the public terribly. They lack compassion or empathy. People are going through some of the darkish Shit, there's no sympathy for them. I like going to fires like the rest of us, but like, hey, salvage matters. You know what I mean? Like, it matters, that the photo albums or the photos are taken off the wall and brought out with care. Right? Like those things matter. You want to educate the public about who you are, carry a good attitude, and treat the public like they deserve to be treated and get out of your own shit. Tired of everybody just caught up in their own shit tired of it?

 James Geering 1:50:30

The mental shift thing is something that's come up quite a bit, you know, whether it's people that come on the show that are now hugely, you know, high performers, whether it's military, first responder, business, whatever it is, but a lot of them weren't on that road. Initially, they were going down a bad road, it was a mentor that turned them. When you have that diversity conversation. One of my friends Chris Hickman here in Ocala, he started a mentorship program. And they have training three times a week at a centrally located fire station, which is usually in the downtown usually is close to some of the most underserved neighborhoods as well. So they remove the barrier to entry to becoming a firefighter. So as long as that child can show up to that fire station, they'll give them gear, they'll give them training. There are scholarships available to fire academy. There's certainly departments dying for people that they come out of Fire Academy to for employment. So you know what, rather than saying, oh, Jeremy, go out and get me you know, 10 English people, we don't have enough English people in our department, you scoop up 10 There might be you know, two good ones, six mediocre ones and a couple of turds. Yeah, but we hit our targets. Yeah, exactly. So now you've gone in you've, you've allowed people from all these communities to try it out. Some are gonna rise and be an incredible firefighter. Some are gonna go you know what, that wasn't what I wanted to do, but at least now I know what it is. And can I do it? And then you know, so so it's the mentorship to me is such a beautiful thing. And you have this very negative kind of movement at the moment that kind of eye rolling kids today's participation, trophies, conversation, which is usually from a you know, obese dude sitting in a lazy boy anyway. Rather than how can I individual a, help someone in my community, I'm a plumber, I'm a carpenter, I'm a teacher, I'm a sports coach, how can I bring a child and be that mentor to turn them from journey a to journey B. And I think mentorship in the first responder professions is an absolute incredible way of not only being out there front and center for the community, but also positively affecting your own town or city, and in turn addressing that diverse diversity element, because if there are underserved people, because not everyone can reach in their pocket and spend five grand go in a fire academy. Now you've addressed that issue as well. So it's a beautiful answer to so many problems.

 1:52:53

Do you know how rewarding it is? To be considered a mentor or somebody that's making an impact and you see the success of somebody else? Like I think I think so many people struggle with fulfillment in life. I think that people are lacking drive, which lacks fulfillment, that they don't feel fulfilled at the end of the day. Do you know how fulfilled you feel when you make a difference for somebody? It is, so if you carry yourself correctly, you fall in love with the job and you're willing to share that with somebody else, I promise you that that impact is legacy. And at the end of the day, right? You're gonna feel very fulfilled that holy shit, this kid that rode the back step with me, I gave him some of these little pointers or I, I let my I let him in. I let them into my world a little bit, right, you're across the guy and you just let your guard down just a little bit to let this kid in. To give him some of your nuggets. Let him see how you conduct yourself. Do your business at the with your with your tools, like let them in. And I promise you at the end of a 2025 year career, the fulfillment you're going to get the satisfaction you're going to get on somebody else's success is leaps and bounds above any success you have for yourself. I've come to realize this you know I used to be so caught up in what I had what I wanted what I needed. And now all I want is for others to feel good. I want people to know that listen, I'm gonna fucking martyr like I'm not sitting here like saying I'm any better than anybody

else. But part of the maturity conversation that you and I had before was really understanding what's important. And what's important to me is walking away from every interaction I have with people and letting them feel a little bit better. If I can do that, I win. Whether whether I got money in my wallet. Whether I'm broken, I don't care, what I need is to be able to walk away from interactions knowing that I made a difference in the conversation with somebody, I need to know that that's this. That's another part of my selfish endeavor. But man, the reward, I get the fulfillment, I get I challenge you this, if you've never had anybody credit you for any of their success, get yourself more active, get involved with people around you. And I promise you that one day when you get that text message, or that phone call, or you see a headline in the newspaper, or maybe it's just that something as you walk past and a garbage can get emptied by that kid, because you taught him to do that. It can be that simple. But I promise you, it will change you. The success of others around you is more important than your own success. Stop focusing on yourself and focus on others, you'll win, you'll do better, you'll feel better, you'll want to be better. And it fuels you to do more. I don't know, just my thoughts.

 James Geering 1:56:02

Well, I think that's a beautiful place to kind of wrap up I want to throw some closing questions at you. But as far as the the bulk of the conversation, that was it, and it was a mic drop moment. The first closing question, I love to ask, is there a book or other books that you love to recommend? It can be related to our discussion today? Or completely unrelated?

 1:56:21

You guys in your books, man? I am. I am not a reader. I struggle with that. And I wish I was. There are some books that I've read over the years, but I don't I'm not a big reader. I'll be honest, I'm a big podcast guy where I get my knowledge is through podcasts. I wish. I wish there were books that I could list. I can't even list titles for you right now with authors. I just can't do it. I don't do it. I wish that that was more important to me. But a lot of I don't know. I feel like I forged my own path in a way. And, and I just don't have the time and to be honest, I patients for me, when I have to read, I don't have a lot of patience, I get bored. I'll be honest, I do audiobooks. I haven't done any in a while because the podcasts have just been nonstop with me educational podcasts, I do a lot of educational stuff. So that's where I get a lot of my external knowledge. I don't and I'm not a big reader. So I apologize man. I've been asked that question before. I wish I had this like really amazing. comeback for you response. Just don't have it, man. I'm sorry. I'm an uneducated boob, you know, just a big dummy that has a lot to say, I guess I don't know. But I'm not a big reader James. So I just don't have a standout book that that is important to me enough to mention.

 James Geering 1:57:42

No problem at all. What about movies or documentaries? Any of those you love?

 1:57:47

Yeah, I mean, I'm, yeah, I mean, come on, man. I'm an 80s 90s. Kid. So like, there's tons of movies out there that were instrumental to me. I do like right now, totally hooked on HEOs

movies out there that were instrumental to me. I do like right now, totally hooked on UFOs UAPs. Now, as they call it, I have gone down this rabbit hole over the last two months with podcasts and information, especially with the Senate hearings that have been happening and so on. I am just really intrigued by that right now. That's like outside of everything else I do that has got me I'm not like sitting on my computer like researching stuff, but like podcasts and stuff. I am so gone down that rabbit hole right now of, of UFOs UAVs. And in all the phenomenon that's going on, it's kind of consumed me right now. I'm not gonna lie.

 James Geering 1:58:32


But next question, then is there a person that you recommend to come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world? And obviously, you've had hundreds of people already?

 1:58:44

Yeah, I mean, I'm so fortunate to surround myself with incredible people. There are some people that certainly are standouts, to me that I, I believe the big thing for me, is being genuine. I think there's a lot of people out there that have incredible messages that bring so much to the table. But then I asked myself, how genuine are they? Like, do they live what they say? Do they emulate the conversation? I think a lot of people have so much good to share. But but there's some falsity to it. I like to think through like the conversation today. I'm pretty transparent. And this is who I am. Right? And I I'd like to I'd like to consider myself genuine. So when I think about people that I like to promote, I really look at that as being a quality because I think that's important. I think if you're going to put your thoughts and ideas out there and people are going to give you their time to listen and absorb that. You need to be somebody that truly epitomizes what you're talking about. You need to represent the words in which you speak. I'll be honest with Mo Davis, I mentioned his name before mode to me is he's like a big kid. And he's the sweetest individual in the world. And I would never cross that man if I ever had to. I've never crossed. He is He is all about his people. He stands up to authority when he needs to. And I truly, truly believe that he is a filament of the American fire service that we need more of. I think when he shines, he shines very bright. And the people that he touches are touched to the point that they want to be better themselves. So I think Moe is certainly a standout to me that I just I don't know, man. He is genuine. He is who he is. No apologies needed. But he's an absolute Southern gentleman. And he's like, six, six, and I wouldn't cross him. But he's, he's incredible. Yeah, he really is. And I'm honored to call him a friend. I really Mo.

 James Geering 2:00:55

I think I've no, I've had mentioned before when I've asked this question, so I need to circle around with him then. So

 2:01:00

I'd love to make that connection for you. If you have any interest. I would make that connection. The second. That's his work. Yeah, his words need to get out there for sure.



James Geering 2:01:08

You Oh, all right. Well, thank you for that. Well, we've been on this whole journey. You know, you've talked about, especially as you said, Turn for a starting National Fire Radio, having this kind of awakening of maturity. What do you do to decompress these days to offset the workload that you have?



2:01:25

I don't know. I don't know. I went away last week we took family vacation, we go to the beach. Every year we took the week off. I pretty much put my phone down. I really didn't answer emails, phone calls. My worlds 24 hours a day I work two full time jobs. Now. I have my family. Squeeze the firehouse and when I can now and so on, but decompress. I love my wife and I are foodies. We love Dining Out. We love cocktails, we love. We love good food, good restaurants, that's important to us. We raised our kids that way too, which is cool. On the weekends. We do a lot of like trying different places. My wife, even though my daughters are 16 and 15. We never shoved the phone or iPad in front of them. We taught them how to navigate life. Be at a restaurant as a child and not need to have a game in front of you. And I challenge you if you're listening this podcast and you shove an iPad in front of your kid. Wrong move. Educate them and then do me a favor put a pack of Uno cards in your wife's purse. That's what we do. And my daughters are 15 and 16. And we go to different breweries on the weekends, dried different restaurants Barfoot, you know, pubs, things like that. My kids have an appreciation for good food too now and so on. And then we'll sit there before we eat and we play Uno. And I can't tell you how many people come by stop at the table and see if 1516 year old girls playing uno with their parents at a table in a restaurant. We're not talking like a three star Michelin restaurant. I'm just talking like your average, you know, you know good pub craft beer place, whatever it is, right? And we play cards. And people walk by and they just look at us with this like, wow. And I'm like, fuck yeah, man. I'm like, why not? Like, I, we eat dinner together as a family as much as we can. Especially during the school year. Summers are a little bit different. Because everybody's crazy schedules. My kids are running all over the place. But during the school year, we reconnect at dinner, whether it's six o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, I'd say four nights a week, we're sitting at the dinner table having dinner together. And that's our time. I think it's important. It's important to connect. And so decompress my family is how I decompress. There's nothing wrong with me laying on the couch at nine o'clock at night with my wife and just turning it all off and watching reruns of house. We're binge watching House right now like till like midnight, some nights and it's bad. We should be sleeping and we're like binge watching House. But like, those are those things. It's just moments. You know, like I don't, I don't have really any other hobbies. Outside of what I do. It's my family. My kids, my wife, National Fire Radio occupies me more than anybody could possibly know. And then it's my other job too. And it consumes me and I don't have much more time in the day. I wish I could tell you I was I had some hobbies. I did this I did that I just don't the fire service for me has consumed me. And I consider when I get to go meet different guys or go on projects. That's for me. It's fun. Like it's, it's enjoyable for me. You know, it's not work. I don't know. I hope it never becomes work. You know, I really do. But decompress for me. It's really when my family is involved. And we like tonight tonight we'll be it's Friday night. We're gonna go jump in the pool. When I'm done with this. I'm done for the rest of the day, jumping in the pool. We're going to do pizza tonight. We're just going to hang out and my kids will probably go out with their friends or whatever my wife and I will chill. It makes me happy and it just fulfillment. I brought it up before and I want



to say it again. You know it's been a topic in my life over the last few years, my wife and I talked about a lot she was looking for fulfillment, she started a new endeavor, and it's been very rewarding for her. You need to be able to have rewards in your life that are self made. You need to have that you need to have fulfillment. And if you don't go find it. It's important because without fulfillment, you're empty man. If you're not full, you're empty. So go find something that makes you feel good about who you are, and the fulfillment you need. And I promise you, everything else gets a little bit better. I believe that?

 James Geering 2:05:35

Absolutely. Well, I want to make sure that you go have your swim ASAP. So for people listening, obviously, National Fire Radio is very well known. But where can people find the show itself and anywhere else online, they can reach out to you. So the

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show, it's an audio format, so we're on all the audio channels, it's been just a wild ride, it's been a lot of fun. We're putting out new episodes almost daily, which is a lot of fun. But it's a tremendous amount of work. So we're on all the audio channels. So you know, Spotify, Apple, Google everything in between. And then from there, it's on YouTube also. So if you want to just put it on your desktop, and listen, you can listen to it. We're getting back to video format, which is gonna be a lot of fun, new studio space, new, new whole new setup, it's going to be a lot of fun. So we have some really cool things coming out the second half of this year, so that's going to be a lot of fun. And then on social media across the board. And if it's anything about the podcast, you can email podcast at National Fire radio.com You want to reach out to me it's Jeremy launch at National Fire radio.com Send me a DM shoot me an email. I'm an open book, man, I talk to everyone. So I enjoy it. I enjoy the people and I enjoy people that want to push this job forward and make it better. And if you put the effort in, man, I got your back. 100%

 James Geering 2:06:52

Well, Jeremy, I want to say thank you. It's been an amazing conversation obviously played a little devil's advocate the beginning, but I think there's so many people that will be their chests, not very many people will have that conversation and you're a great person to have that with

 2:07:04

supposed to do that is reality if we can't have real conversation to disagree yet move on. What are we doing?

 James Geering 2:07:11

Exactly? So it's been amazing. While they long? I think it's the thing, you can walk away and go, huh? Okay, both of you. That's that's what a conversation is supposed to be. But yeah, I mean, the vulnerability to you know, the storytelling of the highs and the lows has just been, you

know, incredibly powerful and needed. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous, especially on a day that you're trying to get to your family now. And come on the behind the shield podcast.



2:07:36

This has been incredible man a great opportunity. And I just want to thank you, I think what you're bringing to the table is an educational sector for the fire service, emergency services military. Your message is powerful and broad, and you bring in incredible people. I'm absolutely humbled and honored to be on your show today. And I had you on as a guest not too long ago, a couple of weeks ago, and that was a lot of fun as well. But I just want to challenge you to keep pushing because you are making a difference in your content matters and believe that believe that your hard work matters, and I challenge you to keep pushing forward and keep delivering man, you're you're making our fire service, just that much better. So thanks, James. I appreciate you man.