

Nick Ricciotti - Episode 810

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SPEAKERS

Nick Ricciotti, James Geering

J James Geering 00:00

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week, it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, former law enforcement officer and current member of reps for responders. Nick Ricciotti. Now in this conversation, we discuss a host of topics from his journey into law enforcement, his time working in the jails, the mental health struggles he had in uniform, his battles with alcoholism, the drug use that cost him his job, the Post Traumatic Growth he got from overcoming that addiction, the power of fitness reps for responders, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredibly powerful and important conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of over 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories. So I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you, Nick Ricciotti enjoy. Nick, I want to start by saying Firstly, thank you so much for your patience. We've moved this interview round a couple of times to accommodate some family issues. So I appreciate that. And secondly, I want to welcome you to the behind the shield podcast today.

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Absolutely no problem. Happy to work around schedules. And thank you for having me. Very excited.

J James Geering 01:56

So where on planet earth are we finding you this afternoon?

N Nick Ricciotti 01:59

This afternoon. You're finding me in Oak Island, North Carolina, which is not where I live. I'm on vacation right now, visiting one of my buddies who used to live up in New Jersey with me. So I'm originally from North Jersey, still from North Jersey.

 James Geering 02:15

The Carolinas are beautiful. But obviously you've got the beach side. You got the mountains wherever you found yourself.

 02:20


We're out on the beach. He's his houses a block away from the beach. You can see the beach from from his balcony. Room.

 James Geering 02:27

Gorgeous. Beautiful. All right. Well, you mentioned New Jersey. So let's start the very beginning of your timeline. Then tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did, and how many siblings

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there. Sure. So I grew up in like North Jersey, Morris County, specifically. Father, mother together, they're still together. I have a sister. And we were like your typical middle class family. Grew up in a small town right on Lake apakah, which is the biggest lake in New Jersey. So there was that doing growing up. I was an athlete. I played a ton of sports growing up, I played soccer, baseball, basketball. Those are like the three big ones growing up. I was pretty good at baseball and basketball. When I went into high school, I pretty much focused on basketball and baseball. got better at baseball as time went on. Five E and M not as quick as a lot of other people in the world of basketball. So my senior year, I kind of cut that out and focused on baseball. And ended up going to school to play baseball, growing up in high school and everything like that was as normal as everything can be. You know what I mean? Like I said, like, I had like your typical family. My mom, dad, my sister. My sister was a senior in high school when I was a freshman. So she kind of like introduced me in high school and everything like that. And then my group of friends were pretty much everybody I played sports with. You know, I grew up in a small town, the town that I grew up in that I went to middle school and didn't have its own high school. So and it's also to have like its own sports programs. So all the sports I played growing up, I ended up going to the same high school as all those other kids. So those are like my group of friends.

 James Geering 04:16

What about occupation? What were your parents doing as far as profession?

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So my dad was a general contractor worked for himself. His own business did small like home renovation, small additions, kitchens, bathrooms, that kind of stuff. And my mom was in or secretary. She worked at one of the hospitals in the county as a secretary. So like I said, like your basic middle class family. My dad worked his butt off to get me every sports equipment that I could possibly need growing up. And I was a catcher. So my appointment wasn't cheap. So yeah, they provide me with everything that I needed when growing up

 James Geering 04:56

with the different sports that you played, you had you had football, soccer Football, you had baseball and you have basketball, I hear a lot about the resilience of the athlete through being a multi sport player from so many people, athletes, coaches, etc. What were things that you brought in from football and basketball that ended up helping you on the baseball side,

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just like that. So baseball is top because it's not individual, an individual sport. But it is, you know what I mean? Like, you're the only one up there in the plate, you're the one in the field that can really help you out. But I feel like with basketball, and soccer, they rely a lot more on teamwork, on communication. And that's kind of what I brought into baseball. And especially like playing the position as a catcher, like you're the one that sees the whole field. So you need to be vocal and tell guys kind of where they're going, what's going on within the field. So if communication is the biggest thing that in general sports has taught me.

 James Geering 06:00

Now, so many people that end up struggling in this podcast, specifically, usually in uniform, it's amazing how many people the kind of origin story doesn't start when they put the uniform on. But way before, when you look at your early life, were there any elements that now you will consider the origin of trauma that is then compacted as you move through?

 06:27

Nothing that like directly comes to mind. And this is actually funny, because I've kind of like I'm in therapy. I've had a therapist for a while now. And we've talked about like, kind of really diving into my childhood. And there's just like nothing that I can kind of pinpoint where it's like, okay, this is kind of maybe why certain things are you know what I mean? Like I was my parents loved me growing up, my relationship with my sister wasn't the best. But there was also a decent age gap there that kind of probably played into that as well. But like I said, like growing up, I saw my parents work their butts off to provide everything that I needed.

 James Geering 07:03

You when that's the thing, sometimes there isn't, it actually comes when you move further into

you when that's the thing, sometimes there isn't, it actually comes when you move further into life. So you're playing Division Two, baseball, kind of, at that time was your career aspirations, simply professional baseball, as you have something else,

 07:17

I knew that I had no chance of playing professional baseball. Oh, I knew I wanted to play college baseball after high school. And I toyed around with going to a different couple different schools, and the school that I went to was just starting their own program. So I felt like going there would give me the best opportunity to compete and play. Because really, that's all I wanted to do is I just wanted to play, you know, I could have went to other schools, but the odds of playing may have not been as good. So I went there. And they also threw me a little bit of money as well, which in the grand scheme of things, as I know, now, every single month, decently expensive school, I don't really think the money they gave me did anything. But like I said, I just want to go somewhere where I could have a chance to compete and play and start, but I definitely saw time and I definitely enjoyed like my college baseball experience. And I only played two years actually going into my junior year, I dislocated my shoulder right in the beginning of the fall season. And that kind of was the end of the baseball career there.

 James Geering 08:26

You end up going down the law enforcement route. Obviously, you're enjoying baseball, were you exposed to that career at all through relatives or friends?

 08:34

Friends, so when I was in college, when I was home for summers, I would lift a gym in my town with another guy who was older than me when he threw some friends and some actually some coaches who coached me in baseball. So we live together. And he he was trying to be a cop. And I had known him in high school too. There's actually times where I left him in high school. He was trying to be a cop. So and I had known that the like law enforcement. Academics wasn't the hardest in college. Like I didn't have great aspirations to be a cop. But I knew that I wanted to make money. I knew I wanted financial security after work as well. And I know I want to get benefits and just the law enforcement world provided that and to be honest with you, like when I went and declared my major, I wasn't even dead set on being a cop and I went into college. I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But there was a point where I had to declare a major and I picked law enforcement because there was no math involved in the curriculum. So I knew I wouldn't have to take math, and that that's ultimately why I chose studying criminal justice. But that guy kind of played a little role in kind of pushing me pushing me there.

 James Geering 09:52

So there's no math in the lead up to law enforcement career.

 09:55


I didn't have to take one math class in college next time

 James Geering 09:59

I get pulled over for speeding, I'm gonna dispute his understanding of numbers. What about the shoulder injury? I kind of skipped back and had a brain fart and move to a different topic. How did you rehab that? Was that surgery? Was it PT? Was it a combination of both?

 10:17

I probably should have done more PT. I didn't do surgery. I just kind of rehab it a little bit. And like I said, not as much as I should have. And I it's caused like shoulder problems. Now throughout the years, like my shoulders are shot. I have a torn labrum and a bone spur and one shoulder and the other shoulder which I would end up dislocating later in life. I have a torn rotator cuff partially. So my shoulders are jacked up. But um, yeah, the second one was a free one. So after college, I started coaching, youth baseball. I worked at a baseball facility giving lessons and I was coaching teams. And it was just the kid threw a ball high. And I went and reached up and my shoulder just popped right out. So but none of them I got surgery for and I kind of rehab all of them that fast to be honest with you.

 James Geering 11:08

Did they ever come out during your time in uniform?

 11:15

In the academy, so when I was in the academy, it didn't pop out while I was like physically in the academy, but it popped out like maybe on a weekend. And I remember, I didn't tell anybody about I told some of my friends about it in the academy, but I didn't want to say anything. And that day for PT, we like got crushed and had to do jumping jacks and squat for us. And we had to jump over like the wall that you have to like jump over in order to pass the Academy. And I did all that with one arm. Like I did my best to try and do a jumping jack without, you know, throwing my arm up. But yeah, I ended up doing all that with one arm. But other than that it was there was no instance where like it ever dislocated at work or anything like that.

 James Geering 11:59

Because I know you can reset it hitting a locker, I saw a documentary called Lethal Weapon.

 12:06

You know, I thought about trying to reset the one when I was playing when I was coaching where I jumped up, and it popped out. Because I'm just around like bunch of little kids like,

we're a practice. And thankfully a parent came around and he actually popped it back for me in place right then and there. But as I'm like sitting there paying, I'm like to I just try and do something here.

J James Geering 12:28

So you're obviously talking about the academy, then at what point did you shift from this, as I'm just declaring my major to actually realizing that you were enjoying this profession that you found yourself in?

 12:42

Probably the academy honestly, um, no, let me rewind sorry, not in the academy. So in New Jersey, so my original position in law enforcement was the CEO was a corrections officer for the county. When you start there is no Academy, you just do like post training, and then you're thrown onto a block within minutes. I knew that I'd like to join the law enforcement world when I was working as a CEO. And I knew that I would be good at it. Because I saw that I can talk to people, you know, if you can, I think everybody should start in a jail. Because if you can talk to an inmate to a criminal, and get the respect, you can do it to anybody, in my opinion. And that's really where I learned to talk to people. That's kind of where you, you learn this whole, like respect that you're not going to be given respect everybody, like you got to earn people's respect. And that's kind of where I learned everything. And were when I was working there, although it wasn't long. I did enjoy it. And I knew that I would enjoy my career in law enforcement.

J James Geering 13:51

I know when I was out in California, as a firefighter, certainly the surrounding counties if you wanted to go in law enforcement, and it was it was like a year or a couple of years, you had to be in corrections before you went out onto the streets. As a law enforcement officer.

 14:04

You'll learn a lot about yourself and what kind of cop you're gonna be starting inside of a jail. You know, you're you'll learn quick if you're going to freeze when you're tested. And like I said, the biggest thing is just learning to talk to people.

J James Geering 14:17

Now with your perspective, and I'm going to say partly load this question because I've I've had lots of conversations about this. I've had prison governors from Norway, I've had lawyers that worked on freeing people who are wrongfully convicted, for example. So the correction system that the judicial system, the way we have at the moment doesn't seem to be the best version of itself. Let's put it that way. And the recidivism rate, I think, you know, reflects that at the moment, with your perspective. Firstly, you know, when we're on the outside looking in as you

create yourself like non inmate a criminal, you know, we kind of label people and obviously, they're in there for a reason. Did you have any aha moments that maybe the human beneath the orange suit like the They weren't all just these, you know, Batman villains when you actually got into that profession.



15:07

They didn't have any like, Aha moments. But I'm like, I've always been a big believer and treat people the way that you want to be treated. So that's kind of how I went into that job. You know, just treat people how you want to be treated. And nine times out of 10, you're gonna get the same respect back. So there weren't, like I said, there were no aha moments, but at the same time, if, if you have that mentality, at least, this is my opinion, you have that mentality that everybody is a shitbag in a jail, they're going to make your life hell because you're going to project that and they're gonna know that and every day you go to work, you're gonna hate going to work because they're gonna get off on bothering you because they have 24 hours a day to do nothing, but kill time.



James Geering 15:52

Yeah, well, I think and then just to take it out of the jail, because I do talk about that, you know, quite a bit. I talk as well a lot about our profession, especially fire and EMS, but also law enforcement when it comes to an addict or homeless person or, you know, a sex worker, where again, we pigeonhole them and they are this bomb, what a piece of shit instead of oh, this is human being not what's wrong with you what happens to you? And when it comes to crimes, there is a victim, so it's not removing the crime. But how did that once toddler get to the point where they did Crime x, and now they've ended up behind bars? And how, how do we take look them as a human, some people are beyond repair. There's always the extremes. But how do we get the rest of the human beings that their mentor instead of maybe a friend that they used to lift weights with the sent them in the law enforcement route? It was someone who's hustling dope and sent them in the gang route instead? How do we corral those younger people and send them into a positive way?



16:48

I think it's just, it's building relationships with people and building rapport with people. You know, like, you go back to the question of, you know, when you're on a street and dealing with especially like drug addicts, and stuff like that. So part of my career, I worked in warrants where we did a lot of post conviction warrants. So we did a ton of work in drug court, which is this a sentence where you need to complete XYZ, but everybody is drug offender, right? So when people would relapse or run away from programs or stuff like that, we would get a warrant, and we would go pick them up. And the guy worked with, like, we did a lot of rapport building and talking with these people, you know, figure out like, hey, like, how did you get here? You know what I mean? Like, not only just to like, kill time while we bring them to the jail, because sometimes we were going far away. But just to make them feel like they're a real person, you know what I mean? Like, just because like I said, somebody has a drug problem or something like that. That doesn't mean that's who they are, or, you know, that they're a bad person and music made bad decisions. And I can personally attest to that.

 James Geering 17:53

With all these conversations, just one more thing before we transition back to law enforcement. Did you notice any common denominators of origin stories again, the sent people into addiction.

 18:05


So up in Jersey, like heroin is like huge, right? Just like it is everywhere else. And like the biggest one was, you know, how'd you get into shooting dope. And most of these stories were the same. I got hurt. I got prescribed painkillers. I got prescribed an ungodly stupid dosage of painkillers. And then they cut me off and I got sick for a few days. I didn't want to be sick. So I went and got more painkillers. And then I found out heroin and fake painkillers are a lot cheaper. So why would I keep buying oxycontin when I can go buy heroin? And then next thing you know, you're shooting?

 James Geering 18:43

Yeah. Yeah. Because I mean, that's part of the, you know, the story. The other part obviously, is, there's a lot of people that take painkillers that take them for two weeks and their descriptions done. They're like, Okay, I'm done with painkillers, you know. So there's obviously there's the trauma side as well, but you add those two together, and dope sick. If you've seen that was a beautifully portrayed story of how oxycontin specifically was. So unethically put onto the medical community and created so much addiction and so much death. And you know, they basically escaped any kind of justice whatsoever, the company behind it.

 19:18

Yeah. And you said it to like that. Yeah, there's the like the pill, the abuse that lead up to, you know, the heroin users, everything like that. But somewhere along the lines, there's going to be trauma somewhere.

 James Geering 19:31

Absolutely. So you're in prison. You're working in a prison? Should I say you're in corrections. Walk me through that transition into the law enforcement side and your initial training as well when it comes to fitness and defensive tactics.

 19:45

So I knew when I got into law enforcement, I start working in jail, but I didn't want to spend my whole career inside of the jail. So I kept testing and eventually I got a letter for the same department actually. So The jail and the like Law Enforcement Bureau of the sheriff's office that


I worked for a run by the same, like I said, the same department, there's just two entities to it. So I got certified for the upfront law enforcement side of it took that ran with the academy, and the Academy, the defensive tactics, training in the PT training, I mean, the PT training is it's all like calisthenics and stuff like that. And a ton of running. And then the defensive tactics training is not a lot like we had like a week, maybe two weeks of defensive tactics, training, all of which you don't retain any of it. You know, if you want to really take defense attack, training seriously, like you need to go out and do it on your own. And I did after the Academy for a little bit. But then let's just go all the way and got too busy. But I've always been into fitness. I've always weight lifted, right after high school is really when I got serious about lifting when I was in college, and it's just kind of transitioned with me ever since.

 James Geering 21:04

So you come out of the academy, What's your first impression of the law enforcement profession, as you see it now boots on the ground? And how did that contrast to that role you had as a CEO.

 21:16

So I started working in courts. So the sheriff's office, were responsible for the superior courthouses of the counties. And that's where I started. And I immediately regretted my decision of leaving the jail. Because I felt like I didn't have a purpose. Like I was useless. Like I just did six months in a police academy, to stand here next to a judge, just in case something happens like this isn't this isn't law enforcement, this isn't police work. This sucks. I there's actually a time where I tried to transfer back to the jail. That's how that's how shitty it was for me. You know, people were like, you're going to try and go back and work in a jail. And like, Yeah, but but here you have straight days or weekends off and 73 there, you could work midnight, shift changed everything like that. And like I know, but like there's I felt purpose over there, I felt like I was more useful. Didn't happen, I ended up staying where I was. I eventually, I'm able to get into a unit that I want to get into that warranty that I was talking about. And that's where the good enjoying work started happening again.

 James Geering 22:41

And what about the perspective? So you've seen the kind of the end point of someone's you know, journey through the legal system in the jail? And obviously, ultimately, prison? What about where you were standing now? What was the what was the contrast for you specifically?

 22:56

So the biggest thing I learned is, people want change, especially with substance use unless they've hit a rock bottom. And it's funny when you talk to people like honestly, it's we're actively using one, they'll always say like, I thought this was my rock bottom, but apparently it's not because here I am again. And everybody's rock bottom is different. Right leg. And a one

overdose could be someone's rock bottom, and they're like, Oh, my God, I need to get my life together. I don't want I'm tired of going to jail, right? Or seven might not be someone's and then they're dead. So that's really the biggest thing.

J James Geering 23:36

So as you progress through what was some of the career calls that you had, I mean, as you said, you're you're issuing warrants or serving warrants, as you progress through your law enforcement when it comes to some of the the trauma that we begin to be exposed to. And it could obviously include time and corrections as well. What was some of those calls that you were adding to your encyclopedia?

i 23:59

On the street, there was like nothing major. But again, like as a human being, like, you're really not supposed to be like, when you look into your brain, your mind everything like that and how your body reacts like you're not built to pull guns on people. The use of forces and stuff like that. You're not, you know, made to like be berated to have people say, Fuck you, I'm gonna kill you. I'm going to rape your children like all this. You know, the thing is like cops and CEOs here. You're not built to hear all that kind of stuff I can not suppose to. I had attempted suicide as a CEO. Where I had to use my little Rescue Tool, we cut them down. My first ever use of force, I remember pretty vividly, which was kind of like a test to me to see if like, how I'd react. And I reacted. We did what we had to do whatever. But it's funny like learning that like later on, like, Hey, that was a test to see like, if you were okay or not. So yeah, that's, that was a, you know, it's funny because I actually, one of the positions that I want to try and do was either crime scene, or Swat, our CERT team. And one of the questions that I got asked in an interview was how do you think you'd react to seeing a dead body like a dead baby? My answer was like, I don't know. Like, how do you know that? You know what I mean? Like, I can't tell you how I'm gonna react. I have literally no idea. I've never seen that baby before. You know? So

J James Geering 25:37

it's a stupid question. Really is if you think about,

i 25:41

like, I guess, I don't know how I'm gonna react.

J James Geering 25:44

Yeah, and you might react perfectly on one day. And then, you know, two years later, you've had a newborn? Yeah. And now you're, you're a mess. Yep. So we'll speak into that. So you, you know, you've gone through this journey so far, you yourself, you know, start to go down a kind of roller coaster with your own mental health as well, what was the first kind of decline that you can see now looking back,

 26:08

I found it okay to start drinking during the week. So when I was working as a CEO, like your days off, and you're new, like, they suck, they're like, Tuesday, Wednesday. So like, those were like, starting to be my drinking days. You know, I had to work on the weekends, work overtime, whatever it was. So I found a group of guys who I could hang out with you from work, and we all went out, and we drank during the week. And then we went to work, our days off came and then the same thing happened. So I'm drinking like started during the week. And the fact that I was living kind of far from where I worked. So like, when I would go out, I'd go out for a while drink for a while. That didn't help either.

 James Geering 26:55

So then you're noticing that you're drinking on different days or extra days, you know, where does that take you

 27:03

on a roller coaster. It takes me to binge drinking is really like what was going on. Like when eventually when the drinking, looking back became a problem is I would just go into these binges where I would drink for, you know, 2345 days after work or whatever it was, and then drive home, and then do the same thing over again. And then something like in my life would happen. And I would stop drinking, I would stop going out. And then I'd be good for a while everything would be status quo. And then the same thing would happen again, go out and I would get after and I would go back and hang out with the same guys that I was like, Alright, I need to stop hanging out from them. Like, this is getting kind of wild now. But then I would just go back out and hang out with them. I my drinking was like a scribe it like a bad ex girlfriend. Like she's toxic. You guys don't get along together. She's not good for you. For whatever reason, whenever she calls you or text you, you answer and you let her back in. And that was like my relationship with drinking.

 James Geering 28:12

So you're having these moments of sobriety and then and then you kind of lapsing again, again, where does that lead you from? They're

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well into getting in trouble with that drinking came drug use as well. When you drink a lot with guys, you realize that no one has to pee as often as some people do. Like there's other reasons why they're going to the bathroom.

 James Geering 28:39

And then all girls



28:42

with hands and any stalls or over the stalls, you know. So they were doing cocaine. I didn't like cocaine. I'm pretty wiry, upbeat guy energy, hi myself without the cocaine. But I always mess around with painkillers. So I would do painkillers, sometimes when we would go out and drink. And that off duty incidence. I had what I described Superman syndrome, where when you're drinking and even like when I wasn't drinking back then like you think you're invincible. And no one was ever going to take my keys when I was out drinking. So I was going to drive home on my own. I'm a big boy, I can do it myself. And I end up getting pulled over a few times. And gradually each incident got worse and worse and worse. Like the first one was like you're pretty typical. Hey, you tell them I'm a cop. I'm drunk. Like can you do something and he ends up driving me home. The home life after that wasn't so great, but I got away from getting in trouble. And that kind of as I found out and I look back, it kind of fuels the fire of I'm gonna get away with this You know what I mean? Because I continue to drink and drive. Not thinking that there ever going to be any real consequences, even though like, you know, there, there could be, especially ones that you're not going to be able to walk away from when you hit somebody and you kill Johnny and his mom in a car. And you walk away scot free, which is for whatever reason always happens. Absolutely. So but again, like Superman syndrome, I never thought that that would happen to me, you know, and I just push those thoughts away and try not to think about them. But eventually, they keep dragging, I keep going on, and the cycle continues to get pulled over again. And for whatever reason, just something inside me didn't sit well with the situation. And I was like, a total asshole to these guys. And all they wanted to do was just help me out and make sure that I was okay, that would get home, okay, like offering to drive me home. And I was just such a dick to them. You know what I mean? Like, I felt like I was better than them for whatever reason. And they end up eventually being able to get me into a car. But after that incident, I find out that I have no professional courtesy in that town anymore. Mind you, that's my hometown that I grew up in, by the way. And again, like you'd think like, that's a pretty good kick in the dick. I felt pretty bad about that. But I got away with it. And that adds more fuel to the fire. And it just continues. And they would have continued on I had one more bad one, we're trying to fight like six cops, who again, were literally just trying to help me out and do what they thought was the right thing. And just make sure I was okay, and get me home safe. And I was just a total victim. And this one resulted in an IA from work. There was the first one officially, that work found out about or I was drinking and driving and being an asshole. Even though I know they knew about the other ones. Nothing says private in law enforcement, like a high school in an apartment. So that resulted in an IA their BA any vibe, took five days suspension on spent on paid and got a nice ask for everything from Admin over that.

J

James Geering 32:09

Well, that brings up a really important point, there is some blind loyalty when it comes to police, fire EMS, you know, when this happens, and I know, for example, firefighters that all of a sudden they're riding their bike to work, you know, no one's saying why they're riding a bike to work. They're not allowed to drive the engine anymore for a period of time. And it's such a double edged sword, because now with this lens, this understanding that I have, you know, seven years into this podcast, for example, you realize whether you're wearing uniform or not,

the alcoholism is obviously as we discussed, you know, trauma that that particular person has chosen alcohol to fill the void, you know, so is it. Is it understandable? Yes. Is it excusable when they wipe out a family in a minivan? Absolutely not. So it's this dichotomy, this this double edged sword. And so sometimes, we do more worse than good by protecting our own, because now that person isn't forced to have that intervention to face it. And, you know, I've got a family member who was grieving deeply after their loved one took their own life, ended up getting a DUI. And that was actually the pivotal point where they were able to start dealing with their grief and trauma, and ultimately, their sobriety as well. So talk to me about that, again, with this perspective that you have now, the theory of brushing these under a rug, we don't want to just immediately terminate someone because there's someone who's in crisis, but at the same time, if we protect them and sweep it under the rug, we're not addressing the problem either.



33:45

Right. And it's like, DUIs were a common thing in my department to between like the jail and the front side, like we they were averaging like a DUI or two a year when I was my time there. But so when I was working, you couldn't pay me to write a cop, I would have never wrote a cop for literally anything unless you killed somebody in front of me, or, you know, absolutely, absolutely had to. But like DUIs or stuff like that, I would have let anybody go all day. But looking back at it, there needs to be something done. Like the days of just picking somebody up, or pulling them over and driving them home or having their friend or wife, whatever, come get them. Like they should be long gone by now. Because you're a cop, and you don't realize that Alcoholism and Substance Abuse isn't an issue in this profession. You're an idiot to be quite frank. So by letting just everybody get away with everything, you're only adding to the problem. And whether that be like a call to their PBA rep. You know, their department, whatever it is, and they can handle it, you know, through the department, whatever. But I definitely think like those days of Hey, buddy, you're a cop. We have the same profession. Your good should be done. And obviously I don't know if there are I'm not a cop anymore. I have no idea. But the use of body cams Ah has probably put somewhat of a stop to that, I would think. But again, like a DUI is traffic infringement in New Jersey, like it's, you can use your discretion, you don't have to act on it. So I'm sure guys are still getting away with murder, you know. But they definitely shouldn't be because like I said, you're adding fuel to that fire and you're, you're not helping you think you are in the moment. And the guy that gets pulled over is extremely appreciative because number one is not in trouble. And number two, he probably realized that he's avoided having to address some things that he has to address that he knows he does. And that was kind of with me too, because it was funny. When I went through my I like that the last time when I was working, when I got into an off duty incident, I didn't remember any of it. So I found out like, through other people exactly what happened. And in my day, they would show me like still shots from their cameras of like everything, and they would read off what I was reading what I was saying to these cops. And they're just like, do you remember saying this, this this and the whole town was sitting there? Like, no, no, no, no, but I'm hearing it. And I'm like, You know what I mean? So I end up eventually getting pulled over or pulled in to my admin office. And as I'm going in there, I'm like, I wonder if they're gonna like, make me go get help. Because after this incident, like I contemplated trying to get some help. I end up not but, and I got called in like, months later after it. So again, like I'm getting called in and I'm like, I wonder if they're gonna make me go to rehab because of everything. Because I was still drinking after that. And, like, people in admin knew that I was still drinking. But I just got like, ripped on they just yelled at me and whatever braid to me. And I left that meeting. And I was, like, relieved. Because I was like, Oh, it didn't make me like a face anything here. They just yelled at me. Like,

I got thick skin like, I don't care. Go ahead, yell at me all you want, just don't make me try and get help. You know? And then like, I looked back, and I'm like, how do you not ask somebody? Like, how do you not even ask the question of, are you okay? Like, why? Why did this happen? You know?

J

James Geering 37:14

Yeah, well, it's, it's the question I quoted a minute ago, you know, that we for so long, we've say, What's wrong with you, to the attic, to the DUI to whatever, instead of what happened to you, and what happens to you is a very compassionate, kind way of looking at it. Now, it doesn't excuse the thing that's now there's, there's going to be a victim or a potential victim if you're pulled over the DUI without hurting anyone. But that act still needs to be punitive. However, trying to get to the root cause of why did you even get to that place? Why is it that Sandra and Steven can drive, you know, all day long, stone cold, sober, but you know, person X is high on drugs or on alcohol, they're both people, but one has got like you said unaddressed trauma. And so if you're not holding us accountable, but also bringing a solution to the same conversation of for example, let's say you are law enforcement, and you do get pulled over and you have a DUI or a firefighter taking that person's job away is only going to compound the problem even more, and they may even lead to death by overdose suicide, you know, whatever, it will end up wiping out you know, family, because you haven't done anything about it, you just cut ties, and you wash your hands of that person, that Swan to be a part of your team, you know, till they retire. So this is the thing that conversation, it's not about, you know, hunting down every cop, you can pull over to see if they got a DUI, but when you come across that you have a responsibility to report but hopefully you have a compassionate addiction policy and your Department of Mental Health Policy will Okay, well, you can't be behind the wheel for X amount of months. But here's what we're gonna do the same way as if you fuck up your back and you've got to have, you know, rehab and all this stuff Cairo, it's the same with this. We're not going to take your job away. However, there are punitive steps that you're going to have to achieve and succeed before you can return to work.

i

39:04

Right. And with that comes should come options too. Because like I said, like when I had kind of toyed with the idea of getting some help, like I was only given one option through my PVA and it was to go to Florida, go to go to inpatient, go to Florida, go down there for 30 days, whatever. And I asked the question like Well, is there anything like up here that maybe I can look into No, go to Florida and now that I'm involved like in the first responder like substance abuse world and you know, I've been involved in trying to get guys some help and stuff like that, like there are a ton of resources around in New Jersey that I could have been given instead of just being told to go to one specific place and looking back like that, that's one thing that kind of chaps my ass about, you know, some of the situations in mind you like I did everything on my own. I take responsibility. No one forced me to do anything like that and I chose not to get any help. Till my career ended, but why wasn't I told that there was a first responder friendly in outpatient 20 minutes from where I live, you know, it's not hard. But usually everything comes down to money. Because when I had spoken to them, like, they were like, I just like, I got a bad vibe from the people down there, like I was just like a number and \$1 sign to them, because I was just instantly told will just come down here. Because I reached out to them again, later, when I got jammed up. I ended up getting suspended from work along with a bunch of other

people, like maybe 678 people through like the grapevine, and you know, other things that happened, they found out that we were using drugs. So we all end up getting spent or whatever. And I'm like trying to figure out like, how do I save my job? Number one, how do I, you know, manage everything. I thought like maybe saving my job would be able to just go down to Florida, and maybe try and get the help. But I didn't really want it number one at that time, I called a number to like set, I got like, just like a bad like, vibe of like, hey, just come down here because one of the first things they said to me is, we've never had anybody lose their job who comes down to our facility, which shows me immediately you don't care about what I actually have going on. You just want me down there for a number of purpose. You know what I mean? So I think like, You got to have options for people. And now there are more of that. Like every department in New Jersey should have what's called a resiliency officer, where they can go to these guys no questions asked and say, Hey, I need some help. What do you have for me, there's more resources that they're given now. And you also can go to any resiliency officer in the state for help, you don't just need to go to your department guy, which is good, because not everyone is always going to trust that guy, obviously. So it's gotten better. Because I know guys who do this for their full time day job where they help guys get in, you know, rehabs. I've driven a guy myself to rehab, I got a call from his resiliency officer guy, you want me to come talk to a guy, tell him what I went through and hopefully be able to help him. And next day, I ended up driving this guy to rehab. So there are more resources out there. However, we all know that not everybody's using them and they're just doing half assed work.

J

James Geering 42:33

One observation I've had because I ended up working for four different departments as four different hiring procedures. And there was a common denominator, one was the polygraph and three of the four. And when I researched for the very first time, I was shitting, my pants and like I've, you know, tried some things in the past, and I'm a very honest person. And I actually, I tried being honest, and the very first app I ever put in, and they screwed it up and threw it in my face and said, you'll never work here. I was like, okay, so So I have to lie. Got it understood. So then, you know, polygraph comes up, and I've just done some stuff that makes you dance a lot, hug a lot of people but you know, is on a certain schedule. In another country, by the way. But anyway, so I realized, well, firstly, the polygraphs bullshit, because I live my way through three of them. And it's not like a beat chest. Wow, that's amazing. It's just it's not science. It's bullshit. It's junk science. And it's really just to freak you out and get you to confess, then we have what what they call, I think it's the Minnesota personality test, which is the only test they give us. And since I've been, you know, so lucky to talk to a lot of people in psychology and psychiatry, they're like that is never meant to be a standalone test. It's for a gamut of tests if you're doing forensic psychology, so it's bullshit as well. So what I've, you know, suggested to people is, take the money, you waste on those two tests, you've done a background, you've done a physical test, you've done a written test. Now take that money and give people six counseling sessions in that first six months or so that you hire them. Now, in your case, maybe there's not a lot that they brought into the job. There's other people I've had on here that were molested all kinds of shit before they ever became, you know, responder or a military member. And so now you have the opportunity to start dealing with stuff at the front door, you've made the mental health conversation completely normal from day one, and you've got to go to person, you know, whoever you spoke to those that's that's you pick up the phone, Steve Sondra, you know, here's what I'm going through, can I come see you? So this is a thing, you know, this is the future. The fact that you come in and you do a bunch of push ups in the academy and get a badge, right? Go rescue people. You know, of course, you're setting yourself up for failure. And this is why we have on top of the fact that that for example, the

firefighter work week is insane. But that aside, we don't make mental health normal. And now the conversation is Oh, we got to get rid of the stigma. Yeah, but what are we going to do about it? Your phone number on the pinboard is bullshit. We actually need to make this part of the onboarding for all these professions. So it's as normal as PT and rollcall.

 45:03

So that's an interesting point that you bring up. Because if you have pre existing trauma prior to working in a career like this, where you're going to be exposed to traumatic experiences, it's almost guarantee that it's going to trigger something, you're gonna look for ways to cope with it. And so if you do that, you're almost, you're addressing that trauma, like you said prior. And guys might not be able to work right away, to be honest with you with that, like that might be a turn off, but at the same time, like, you're gonna be able to save your career in the long run, or save yourself, because you need these things addressed. Because if you don't like, those doors are going to open eventually. And if you're not prepared for them to be open, which most of the time you're not, you're gonna find ways to cope. And usually they're unhealthy ways drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, you know, the list goes on and on. Such things I've never actually heard anybody bring that up, it's actually really interesting. And I like it to be a future therapist. Great work.

 James Geering 46:07

Well, the thing is, you know, I've talked about this a lot, the health of the men and women that serve in your department, or your city or your county wearing uniform, you'd think that would be enough to motivate you to create a great environment, let me be very clear, there's some people that should never be in this profession. And we need to weed them out, too. But sadly, that isn't enough for a lot of employers. So the other side is the budget. And with this particular idea, you take the money, you're wasting on those two things, the polygraph and the the sight test, and you simply just reallocate it to an onboarding, counseling session instead. Because if you haven't been able to eliminate someone by the oldest tests that you've done, on the background check, then you know, I mean, the polygraph the site, I mean, they're, I know, great candidates are excluded because of those, and they didn't do anything wrong. And they had a clean sheet, you know, so

 47:01

this is a joke, this isn't looking for traumas, looking to hear an answer of what you're gonna say, you know, doesn't actually dig to see if there is trauma there. And no one is going to admit to anything in their psych, because they're going to fear that they're going to be psyched out and not get a job, obviously. So there's no trust there either. And the whole, you know, you talked about breaking the stigma. That's, like, I believe, and from what I kind of see now, the most people who want to break that stigma, are the people who have gone through some shit who have had bad experiences, substance abuse, you know, whatever themselves. And what they realized when they go through everything is that they're not alone, that there were a ton of other guys out there who felt the same way as them who had the same suicidal thoughts, who were depressed as them who, you know, had some shady things happen to them on the job or growing up, and you realize, once you start working on yourself, other guys have gone through

the same shit, something similar, and that you're not as alone as you thought. And what happens is, especially like, in a, I don't run, I don't use a is like my base for my recovery program. But one of the things is like, they encourage, like part of recovery, is to share your experience, strength and hope. And that's what these guys do, who go through some shares, they start sharing, and they want to break that stigma. But how many other people who have never who don't have a substance abuse problem? who think that they're perfect, or who have an issue, and they don't think they have an issue, which I'm sure there's obviously a lot of guys as well care about breaking that stigma, too? Or how much does admin really care about breaking that stigma? You know, I don't think as much as the guy who has gone through some shit, who was able to correct himself who's living a healthy, sober life now, I think he cares more about breaking the stigma than the guy who it doesn't affect, you know what I mean? And really, that's sort of like the problem is, is, is the stigma ever going to be broken? I don't know. But more people need to care about the mental health of others, in order for that to happen.

 James Geering 49:05

Well, over and over and over again, I hear people who, you know, have been through this journey, and I'm sure you've probably had this to come out the other end, you know, and when they were deep in that journey, we're all looking around, you know, again, during roll call or lineup in the fire service, or at a hospital, whatever it is, and you're like, everyone else is fine. What the fuck is wrong with me? I'm alone. I'm a pussy, you know. And then ironically, we're also damn good at putting on the mask that everyone else is thinking the same thing. So I mean, not everyone people have good days and bad days. But you then have this person within your group who goes through this journey comes out the other end and over and over and over again. They're like, dude, they came out of the woodwork. Hey, can I can have were with you a sec. Because you finally had the courage to be vulnerable and, you know, come out the other side, like give hope to people like you're not just going to spiral downward until you end up in a coffin. There is a way out that you realize actually how many People are struggling. So that's what's so sad is there's this facade of doing fine. But behind scenes, and I would argue even like city and council, if you're if you're a council member of a county, and you know that there's all these firefighters suicides, and it doesn't bother you, I would say you've probably got a mental health issue too, that you need to address because it should bother you.

 50:20

Absolutely. And like, that was my mindset, as well as my friends is like, I'll never speak to anybody. You know, I don't need to speak to a therapist, there was a point where I came home hammered one day, and my girlfriend is just on the couch, bawling her eyes out crying, like literally begging me like you have a problem. Like, please just get help. And I looked her dead in the eyes, and I go, Fuck you. I'm never going to talk to anybody. And that was it. And that that was my mentality. until like, I started therapy. And my first experience with therapy, like wasn't great, either. The first therapist I saw, she sucked. I didn't like her, we didn't click Well, we didn't have a therapeutic rapport relationship, and I stopped seeing her. So I had like, went through, you know, a few weeks where I didn't have a therapist, or I was trying to figure things out on my own. And I eventually find that therapist who I see now who I think is aces. And now I'm like a huge, you know, therapy advocate, I think fucking everybody should see a therapist, like what better way to get everything off your chest and to go talk to somebody who's going to

be completely unbiased about you know, things, you know, like, what do you have to hide from somebody who do you feel isn't gonna judge you? Nothing. And that's where work starts happening. When you can be honest with somebody and be honest with yourself as well.

 James Geering 51:37

How did you find the first therapist? Was it through the EAP program? It was another route?

 51:42

No, so my buddy, at one point who wasn't a cop saw therapists, I asked how he liked her. He said she liked her. So I call her I have a console there. But one of the first things I asked her is like, Do you have experience with first responders with cops? And she's like, Yeah, I worked with a ton of cops, I understand, you know, the, you know, the blue community, and you know, whatever. Give it a shot. But like, as I'm like, talking, and there's certain things that I'm talking about, to kind of like realize, like, you don't really understand what the hell I'm saying, like, I don't think you really get the first responder world. Actually, I think he just lied. So I stopped seeing your and then the therapist that I see now is referred to by actually one of the guys I got jammed up with. He referred me over to her. So I started seeing her. And like I said, like, she was Asus.

 James Geering 52:31

I've heard so many EAP horror stories, it doesn't have to be through EAP. And also, this is something that someone brought up very recently, actually, that now because it's becoming a demand, a lot of counselors are putting first responders on their list of specialties and you know, you see some of them everything from family to divorce to you know, like, what, how the hell, you know, how are you an expert on everything, you know, so, but that culturally competent clinician that truly understands the way we talk, the way we work, what we see the shifts, etc, etc. is invaluable. And, and it's tragic, because I've heard stories of, you know, counselors bursting into tears counselors, telling the person to get out there can't help them. And what haunts me is, Okay, those are the people that survived to tell that tale. They had, luckily, the fortitude to still stay around long enough to find someone who was right will find psychedelics or equine therapy, or whatever the thing was, but how many people have we lost because they went there in Crisis or near crisis, and someone who they trusted told them, I can't help you, you're crazy. Stop telling me these horrible things. And then they went and stuck a gun in their mouth. Yeah,

 53:41

and there's, there's a couple of ways to like to get some credit and like, be able to call yourself like a, you know, I don't want to say expert, but you know, specialize in first responders, whatever you want to say. And that's number one through education. Because you need to understand trauma, PTSD, substance abuse, all that kind of stuff you need to understand, right? And there's also experience, and that doesn't have to come firsthand, that could just come through the education and then you start getting experience by working with first

responders that work shouldn't just be through counseling sessions, like you need to really go out and try and figure out like, what is the first responder community really about, you know, and then the other way is, been there done that you've been in that world you were cop, firefighter, first responder or whatever. And, you know, you understand it, which is kind of why like, I went into the field that I'm in now. So I'm currently in grad school right now. For clinical mental health, like I want to go and I want to be able to help the guys I want to be able to help who I was four years ago. So, you know, you've been there, you've done that you have your street credit, whatever it is. And hopefully that allows people to be able to trust you a little bit more because in therapy, like it's all about trust, you have to trust the person you're talking to. You have to trust that They really understand or know about what you've been through and can relate. So yeah, hopefully that's a that's a long term goal there.

 James Geering 55:10

So you talked about being resistant to the Florida facility, again didn't have a good rapport a good success with that. You also talked about the the pill, so kind of walk us through the rest of that roller coaster before you, you began to get your Upswing what was the lowest point

 55:31

getting married, and then getting arrested two weeks later isn't like the best way to start your marriage off. I don't really recommend that to anybody. So that wasn't fun to go through. I also didn't handle I didn't deal with this, like the best way in terms of like family. I tricked myself for a long time thinking I might be able to get out of what I you know, out of what I had gotten myself into the back of my mind, like I knew there was no shot really. So I had told my girls a time that I gave her pieces of what I thought might happen, you know. And this came after we got married. And I didn't realize I was really totally screwed until I had a meeting with the prosecutor's office and they throw a packet of evidence. And I go through and I'm like, Okay, I'm screwed. So you know, I have that meeting, and I ended up you know, I tell her everything like, this isn't going to be good. And the only person I had told in my family was my dad. So when I get jammed up, I get married, my parents are living in Texas, that's where my sister is, as well. My sister moved out there with her husband a while ago. And then my parents, you know, ended up going out there with grant for their grandkids or whatever. So I get married, and I'm telling my dad, I'm like, I need you to come. And this is how to COVID By the way, I got my initial wedding got canceled May of 2020 COVID happens. She's pregnant at the time. So we're like, we want to do something before you know we have a baby. So we have a mini COVID wedding. Very small wedding, like 30 people or whatever. But I'm telling my dad, I want to tell my parents, I want to tell my dad closely. My dad and my mom, I want to tell my dad and I'm like, I need you to come here. And he's like, Well, it's COVID, whatever. And like, no, like, I need you here, you know. So he ends up flying out for the wedding and everything. And I tell him like the truth. I'm like, I got into a lot of trouble. I'm like, I drink too much. I was doing drugs, and I'm gonna lose my career. And the first thing he asked me, I'll never forget this. And I remember told the story, but he looks me down in the eyes. And he's like, are you okay? This is the best response you could possibly give as a father, after I just tell you, Hey, I just talked my career up, I drink too much. And I do drugs, by the way. And he's just like, are you okay? And I'm like, yeah, like, you know, I'm working on things that haven't therapists now, you know, I'm good right now. And he's like, alright, just make sure you always come to me first. You know, whatever says all the right things that you need, say, as a father. And I don't tell

anybody else either, though. So I don't I keep everything a secret. I didn't tell my sister. Until the day that I was in the newspaper. I didn't tell my mom until the day before I was in the newspaper. So all this, you know, secrets for everybody. I had like a lot of money to do relationship wise. So that sucked. I told my friends and all my friends, all my real friends, I should say we're totally supportive. Totally cool about it. Asked if I needed anything, you know, which was good. But as far as like the work away from like, the relationships, like the personal work, so I started seeing a therapist, and she turns me on to resources that I wanted to hear 789 months ago. And the first one was a program for first responders called out bottles and badges. Now, again, this is all zoom, Hydra zoom, or, I'm sorry, this is COVID like the height of COVID. So the first meeting I go to, I'm on Zoom, and I go there and I remember having a glass of wine behind the computer because I'm like so nervous. I go through the meeting. I hear guys tell their story. I hear people say how they can relate to what this guy went through. And I could also relate to the guy who told his story. So I don't end up drinking the glass of wine, right? My first meeting was the day before I plead guilty and lose my career and everything. You know, all it's done. After I plead guilty, I drink but don't get hammered. I literally I just go to one of my friend's house and I have two beers and those that done didn't drink the rest of the day. I really believe the reason why they get hammered and really let out as much steam as I wanted to. Just because I went to that meeting. Because I had guys checking up on me who I had literally just met one day go check it out for me the next day asked me if I was okay, because I had to share the you know, whatever, like Hey guys, I'm not going to be a cop anymore. I'm gonna be a first monitor. You know, this is what happened. And everybody was totally cool and totally supportive. The next day Thursday, I go out with one of my God, my friends who I worked with. And we pour a shot of Jameson and a blue moon, which is like my go to. And I take my shot. And I'm looking at I'm blue moon might have been the other way around, I forget. But whatever it was, I'm like, I'm done drinking. That was my last drink. I continue with the bowels badges meeting, I go every week. And I start looking into other resources, right, especially when my sentencing came up. So I have my therapist now who I see at least once a week, I'm going to these bottles and bought bottles and badges meetings. Things are getting better in my life as I'm getting sober. But now I have to face the whole uncomfortable situation of being sentenced, I'm going to be back in the newspaper, again, it's going to trigger things from relationships that were shit, and I'm having to work on now. So, you know, I asked my therapist, I'm like, I need some more help. And she turns me on to a guy named Frank who was running a nonprofit, who I am now working with, called reps responders. So I looked them up on Instagram, I was following their account at the time, probably just that their regular, you know, first responder cop fitness account, and didn't ever give it much attention until I actually looked at what they were doing. So I DM him and I'm like, Hey, man, this what's going on? Like, I was a cop? I'm not anymore. I was drinking too much sober now. Got some shit going on? Like, you know, can I start coming through your meetings, because they were running meetings twice a week. And he's like, Absolutely, he's like, we'll just act like you're retired early. He's like, you're good. So I start going to these meetings, and I started talking with Frank. And I just realized more that I wasn't alone. And I start using the people, especially in reps as my support network. So as I start going to reps and going to the meetings, and I start showing up to the events that they're doing, I start thinking what is going on at rest responders is really cool, and really needed. Putting together mental health and physical health, to me is like a no brainer. You know, you can't just focus on one and ignore the other, I don't think it's going to work, I think you have to care about them both and put some work into both. And that's exactly what we're EPS is doing and what we do. And I just I start going to events, I start being supportive, going to every meeting, me and Frank develop a good relationship. And, you know, one day I just asked him, I'm like, I want to help, you know, like, I see what we're doing here. I want guys to know that they're not going to be alone, you know, like, I want to help these guys too. And Frank brings me on and, you know, I start being able to help guys, I've become, you know, a peer support for

people when people were reaching out who needs somebody to talk to, and I through this, like, I've gained, like lifelong friends as well, you know, guys who have reached out to reps and needed some help. And, you know, Frank asked me to call them and next thing I know, like, I'm talking to a guy for an hour initially, but now like we're texting or DMing, like we're going, we're meeting away from like these reps meetings, we're going to get workouts in, you know, we're going to eat after like, it's it Pierce is the true definition in my mind at pure support of not just making a phone call to somebody, but staying connected, you know, meeting in person going out, having laughs with people forgetting about the suck, you know, and that's what we try and do reps is try and get people to forget about the suck. And then from there, all those things that I mentioned, I'm, I still do, you know, the meetings are tough now, because I'm just personal life like, I have a kid, just I work full time. I'm in grad school full time. I you know, a lot of these meetings are that I like to do her on Zoom. So it's just tough to get to them all. But like, that's something I should be making them a priority now that I say this out loud.

 James Geering 1:04:08

You're welcome. That'd be 100 bucks, please. Yeah, right.

 1:04:14

But there are they're all there. You know what I mean? And they're always going to be there, which is good. But so that's, that is like my support system. And they've all been incredibly valuable and helpful throughout. I've got this October will be three years of sobriety, with knock on wood, no relapses, and just taking it one day at a time, but I think especially like wraps. There needs to be like more of it, where you're open about what you go through. Like I said, like in order to break stigma. People need to be open and vulnerable. You know, because sharing your story sucks. You know, like, I remember the first time I told my story. I was okay. And I was As the time goes on, like the story evolves, right? So like the first time I told my story is completely different than how I speak about it now, because there's just something in the beginning. Like, there's, there's no good. You know, it's like, Hey, I'm 90 days sober. But 90 days ago, I was in the newspaper for, you know, doing drugs, and now everybody thinks I'm a shepherd, you know. So, it's cool to see how the story evolves. And things get better and better. Like, they say, like, your life gets drastically better when you become sober. Well, that that's been the case for me. And knock on wood hopefully continues. But you just, you need to be vulnerable. Like I said, You need to be able to share your story and realize that, like, sometimes it will be triggering. Because there are times where I was telling my story too much. Because I felt like I need to, everybody's gotta hear that, like, you're not alone. And you can get out there and you know, ask for help, it's okay. And I was like, triggering the fuck out of myself. You know, like, I remember, like, there were times where, like, I would go, and I would tell my story, and I put on the face of like, everything's good inside, and I go to my car, I start fucking crying, because I'm bringing up the fact that I pissed away like, a pretty good career, I hurt a lot of people. You know, like, I hurt my family, I hurt my friends, like, you know, I was just triggering myself. And all these things, like, just come with the reminder of like, the work is never done. You know, like, every life is a process, you know, just so you figure out one issue, you know, I figured out how to not drink. Well, now I need to figure out ways to fill the void of like adrenaline. Because that's what drinking gave me like, drinking gave me a big adrenaline

rush. So like, now I'm working on well, how do I fill that void of adrenaline with something that's healthy, too. You know, so there's always, there's always work to be done. There's always going to be issues. But having that support system is the biggest thing by far.

J James Geering 1:07:00

I have a guest on the show Johann Hari who I talk about a lot because his his work is amazing. But he did one book on addiction. It was called Chasing the scream. And he quote, one of the quotes in there that he says is the opposite of addiction is connection, not SEBRAE. And I think that's beautiful. Because if you think about specially when people transition out of a career that they love, that was their tribe that was their, their group, their unit. And whether it's retirement, you know, being fired, promoted to a desk, whatever it is, you see a lot of people struggle military first responders, especially. But you went from one tribe and is, as you pointed out, some were real friends, some were, you know, fairweather friends as they say. But then you found another community to transition to whether it was the bottles and badges or whether it was reps or responders. So I think it's such an important takeaway from what you've told us is you've got to find that supportive tribe, one tribe took you out drinking, and like you said, you were part of that. But you were drinking, you were doing drugs, another tribe was healing and working out. And it's kind of like, we use the description earlier with prison. One tribe takes you down to law school, the other tribe takes you down the gang life, you know, it depends on which tribe you surround yourself with.

o 1:08:12

And it's fine, like, and I've learned to, like, you can have the best support system in the world. But like, you have to be honest, that's obviously like, the biggest thing is being honest with these people. And sometimes that's not the easiest thing to do. And like, there have been times where I wasn't honest with them, or myself, and you take those mistakes, and you take those experiences, and you learn from them. And, you know, but honestly, with anybody who's obviously, you know, in these in this world that I'm in now, and the relationships that I've built, the friendships that have built things, just honesty, and being, you know, open with people is the biggest it's, and it's not always easy. Like I said, I don't want to say like, being sober is easy, because it's not. Nor is, you know, being in therapy, like sometimes therapy sucks, you know what I mean? But you remember after why you're there, and you feel better, you know, like, I paid my therapist, \$100 an hour just to sit there and cry. But you feel better after you know. I mean, everybody's different. But I've been able to find like a, like, a good support network, like you said, a good community. And I'm lucky for that, you know, some people aren't as lucky or they're just not ready for that. You know what I mean? And we get that guys, you know, people through reps who come in, they're not ready to surrender, like they say, and that's fine. The biggest thing is being there for people, you know what I mean?

J James Geering 1:09:42

Absolutely. The opposite to come. Well, I think the one of the real negative factors that contributes to a lot of the struggles is when we were younger. I talked about this a lot because I think it's a real thing. A lot of us were exposed to mass The alinity Being John Wayne Arnold, you know, they're not crying, they're just killing Vietcong by the scores and, you know,

adjusting their headband and walking off into the sunset. And then you actually look at real men. And I always point to the band of brothers, there's the show the real man of Easy Company that's talk in their 80s 90s By that point, and they're still moved and in tears by what they did, and what they saw and who they lost. That's masculinity. And that's courageous vulnerability to cry on, you know, on screen from millions to see. So this is the other thing that we're dealing with this, you know, are tough guys keep it in no, it takes so much more strength and courage to be vulnerable. And ask for help and or be vulnerable and find someone who needs help a lot of us, you know, if you're doing well, beautiful, but you're the shoulder, let your partner cry on it, you know, but if you're parading around like a peacock, even though you're dying inside, that's actually cowardice. That's not courage.



1:10:59

No, it's not. And I've talked about this before. You need to be like the whole like, tough macho shit like in that, you know, world in law enforcement world literally thrown out the window, like everybody is a person that, you know, you don't need to put on like this facade of I'm like, big and tough. And, you know, a dead baby is not going to, you know, bother me like that, in that interview. Like, what do you want me to say? Yeah, I'm gonna be okay. I don't know. You know what I mean? Like, and no one should ever say, Yeah, I'll be okay. Because you have no idea.



James Geering 1:11:28

You talked about your early life being a pretty solid foundation, which is beautiful. Have you been able to identify some of the negative factors that led you into addiction?



1:11:39

Given I'm not going to talk about them? Because there are things that I haven't fully worked out yet. But it's funny that you bring up play that the whole macho, tough guy thing that I just lost my train of thought on. Like, mine came from, like, the gym. You know, like, this is something that I've explored before is like, where do I get this like, tough guy attitude from like, you know, like, my dad was never like, imposed like this Boys Don't Cry aspect on me. You know what I mean? And I was like, Where'd I get this from? Like, mine came from the gym of like, watching videos, when I was in college, watching videos of bodybuilders like Ronnie Coleman, and like, Jay Cutler, were like, famous bodybuilders. And I was in college. And I'm watching videos of these guys, and they're just throwing up 800 pound, like walking around massive, and I'm like, oh, that's what that's what fucking, that's man, fucking big, strong, you know? And that. Now you bring in to a career where you need to be big and strong. And that's where like, my whole aspect of like, well, I don't need help. I'm tough. You know what I mean? But like you said, like, tough is asking for help, you know, and then asking for help, again, when you've already done it. Because sometimes it gets easier, but sometimes it doesn't. You know? That's tough. And you need to be emotional, like you said, but you also need to be able to control your emotions as well. Can't just be a walking, you know, Cry Baby, they don't say it. But like, cry baby all the time and cry about everything. You need to be able to, you know, handle what you need to handle in the moment. But then realize that it's something that you need to eventually address to go address it when you're ready. You know, that's the that's really like, the important thing, especially as a cop is like, in the moment, do you do what you

need to do? You put on that face, you put on that front? You know, when you're working? When you're dealing with EVPs, or gay marriage, or whatever it is, you do, you need to do to be tough. But after you need to know that there's different ways of being tough. And sometimes that involves crying, or picking up the phone and asking for help.

J James Geering 1:13:50

Absolutely. Well, I always talk about the Yin Yang, you know, you've got the black and the white. And obviously, each piece has a tiny bit of the other one inside it. But you know, a man or woman, whatever a human being is hard and soft, you know, and what we end up doing especially in uniform, is that soft part kind of fades away, and it ends up just a white circle? Well, you know, absolutely. I agree. Like if I go into a structure fire, I can't be like, hey, fire, come over here. Let's talk about your feeling. No, put it out with a hose. You know, I've got to cut that family out of a car. But when we get back, and we just saw a decapitated three year old in the backseat, because the tweaker mom had been up for two days and ended up crashing the side of a freeway. You have to process that shit. Like you said, how would you would you be able to see it? I can see it. But I sure as shit better deal with that because no human being should have to see it. And so we see it so no one else has to you know what I mean? So we're being asked to do things that 90 whatever percent of the population just fucking do not want to do. And they're like, Yeah, you do that. Okay, well, fair enough. But there's a cost to that. And if you're not bringing in that soft that I think Yang got that right. Then you're gonna end up Being so brittle that you just gonna break to pieces eventually.

 1:15:03

And some issues with that is when you're in bigger departments like you don't have time to process calls after you've been on one because you probably have to go to another one. You know what I mean? But like, as department wise, you want to talk about like admitted stuff like that, like there should be policies in place mental health policies, where if you see XYZ, where they're considered a traumatic event and traumatic experience, like you're mandatory, you need to go see somebody, and it shouldn't just be a hey, are you okay? Do you need anything? Yeah, I'm good. Because most most people are gonna say, Yeah, I'm good. You know what I mean? There should be a little bit more in depth work of will did seen that dead baby set really messing with you right now. Are you just telling me you're okay? And I don't want to speak for this person. But I truly believe that like one of the guys I got jammed up with, who started progressing and getting worse with like alcohol and drugs. Like if you want to look at a timeline, like, he did CPR on a guy who committed suicide in the gun room in the locker room, he responded was doing suicide to or CPR to a guy with no head. And he got zero. Like, wasn't asked for any treatment or anything after that incident. So it's like, it's gotta be more done here, obviously.

J James Geering 1:16:19

Yeah. And sometimes right after the incident isn't the right time. You know, you might you might rear has had a month, you know, a week, a month, a year I was, that was a real call that decapitate a three year old and I was in Disney. I wrote about this in my book, I was in Disney and it was shit. Five, no more than that eight, nine years later, and someone was wheeling

their, their kid in a stroller. And it was the same little hangs that are little legs hanging out of a blanket that the engine crew were thrown over this, this kid. And I flashed immediately back hadn't hadn't had any flashbacks ever in my life. And I flashback to this kid, I just got this rush of adrenaline end up sitting down. So I'm wiping my head, just let me just sit down for a few minutes. And luckily, that was super mild compared to you know, what some people deal with in our profession as far as flashbacks and nightmares, etc. But it gave me a an insight like, Fuck, I can't imagine having this over and over and over again. So that was years later. But again, it goes back to at the front door, have you got the people it might be an hour after your incident, it might be a year, it might be two days before your retirement. But you need to have that direct correlation in the direct relationship scuze me with that person that you trust, and be like, you're not going to fucking believe this. 25 years ago, I had a drowning, and I just had a fucking flashback and fell on my knees. Beautiful. Let's talk about it. Come on in.



1:17:44

It's crazy how the mind works. Is that how it can block away this awful event? And just one thing, boom, it becomes so real to you the next?



James Geering 1:17:52

Yep. Yep, exactly. Well, let's talk about that. And so you know, you, you have this incredible upswing, you know, you've got the community of all these great organizations that you've named reps, or responders, you've joined them yourself. Talk to me about what made you decide to actually be a part of the solution wearing a completely different, you know, work uniform now and going into the world of mental health yourself? Yeah. So



1:18:15

right now, so I was working for a moving company, I still work for a moving company just put, you know, food on the table for you know, a roof, whatever. But I started looking into like career options, obviously. And with my therapist, we go through this, we're talking about things, and she brings up like going back to school for what she does. And I'm like, I don't know, like, I'm not the smartest person in the world. You know, maybe whatever, going back to school and getting more school loans doesn't really appeal to me, You know what I mean?



James Geering 1:18:48

Does they have a math prerequisite over you good.





1:18:53

Research and Statistics. So the first time in college last semester, which I had to get a tutor for because I was not doing that well. But I ended up getting hired by the ironworkers union up here. I got into their apprenticeship program. So I was like, let's be gonna be a blue collar worker, you know what I mean? Let me go, I get back my pension. I get back really good health

benefits. The job is going to probably provide an adrenaline rush being up on you know, buildings and bridges and whatnot. So I had gone through the process I get accepted, but just for shits and giggles I ended up applying to grad school. At the same time, I got accepted into grad school and I got accepted into the apprenticeship. It's like the literally the same like day or like days apart. So I'm like sitting ready to fill out the paperwork to start my apprenticeship. I'm ready to pay my first union dues and um, I like literally just like stand up. And I'm like, fuck this. I don't want to do this, you know? So I go into grad school. And the idea came from working with reps. You know, I started realizing that I feel good helping people You know what I mean? Like, that's, it's corny to say like, you become a cop. Yeah, the benefits are good, whatever the pay is decent. It's not great. It's decent. Like, you have to have like some desire to help people, if you want to be a cop, unless you're one of those people where you shouldn't be a cop in the first place. You have a desire to help people, and you feel good when you do that. And that was me. So when I started getting that feeling back, I got back what I had lost previously, which was purpose. So I'm doing it and I'm like, You know what, let me just make some money doing this. Now let me just make this my career, how can I help people will I have experienced in that first responder world, I'm helping people now seems like I'm pretty good at it. Let me learn, let me go and learn how to really do it. Let me broaden the scope of who I can help. I don't want to just help like a few cops who you know, reach out to reps wherever, like, I want to really start helping people and understand what people have gone through and help them process it and make them feel like they're not alone. And, you know, here I am. I'm a year in. Last fall, I took five classes, my program is fully online, thank God. So last fall, I took five classes. Last spring, I took five currently, I'm in the summer course where I'm taking four classes. And then next month, I start my mini internship with a few classes and then next spring, May 24, I'll be in an internship and graduate.

 James Geering 1:21:26
That's amazing.

 1:21:29
I'm looking forward to it. It's been a challenge, which has been good for me, because I I enjoy challenges. You know, I like doing things that are hard. Grad School has definitely been hard, because mind you like my background in education is criminal justice. So like everything that I'm learning, I have to like, pretty much self teach because of an online program. Like there's no, you know, lectures or anything like that are very minimal. So I'm teaching myself all this information, I'm trying to retain as much as I can, while I work full time and, you know, take care of who I need to take care of and, you know, fulfill personal responsibilities and whatnot. You know, like I have a two year old. He requires like a ton of work and a ton of time. And, you know, I do bedtime a lot. So like my work, I'm starting my homework at like 910 o'clock at night and staying up till one two in the morning, waking up going to work like it's been a grind. It's been tough. But and you get through it, like I said, through that support system. And realizing that, yeah, it's all for a better purpose.

 James Geering 1:22:31
Absolutely. Well, as you're going through all this training, have there been modules that have addressed your own self care? Because one of the questions I asked a lot of the counselors and

psychologists and psychiatrists is how do you offload your own vicarious trauma? Because I know just from from this listening, there's some weeks with just some really, really dark conversations. And you know, if I'm not hitting the pause button myself, you can feel it. I mean, you absorb that trauma as well. So have they addressed that up to this point in your training?



1:22:59

Yeah, we thought like, I like the programs online. So yeah, I've, you know, I've learned about vicarious trauma, and, you know, they, they encourage every therapist to have a therapist, but a lot of like, with programming I'm in because of the style of the, you know, the courses and everything like that, like I take it upon myself to kind of dig deeper into things. And like, I'll talk to my therapist about, you know, certain things that are brought up in school that I may not fully understand. And I'll get her opinion on it, you know what I mean? So and another added benefit of being in therapy and being in a clinical mental health program is I'm able to ask her some questions. And the biggest thing is like, it's self care, it's I know, it's like, kind of corny, but you need to practice self care, you know, and whether that be like going to therapy, or going to the gym or just going for a walk making time for the people who are important in your life and make you feel good. You know, that's all it is. Easier said than done, obviously. But you need to make it a priority.



James Geering 1:23:59

Well, one last kind of area before we get to some closing questions. So many people are discouraged because they try a thing once and they're like, that was bullshit didn't work, like you said, counseling, you know, EMDR whatever, the more the longer this podcast has gone on the bigger this toolbox is becoming of things that might be the right combination for a certain individual. It might be surfing and psychedelics, it might be EMDR and you know, hypnotherapy and maybe all kinds of things. So what would you tell the responder or anyone else who's listening about the journey of finding the right therapy for themselves and not giving up in with that first, especially the first kind of EIP EAP nightmare that I've heard so often.



1:24:43

You need to understand going into it that number one, do not you may not hit on the first try. So you need to just be honest and with yourself and hopefully like you're getting some guidance with this too, because I was able to get some guys and find the right one as well. So don't be afraid to ask questions. You know what I mean? Like that out who you're going to talk to try and see if they really understand a little bit of what you're going through, or if they're just bullshitting you just to try and get you into the door, you know, because it's gonna be trial and error with finding a therapist, and then it's gonna be trial and error in therapy, you know, like, there may be things that you do that don't work well, you know, like, EMDR, may not work for you. Okay, there's other things that you can do, you know, don't be frustrated, just because one thing doesn't work, because there's a list of other things. And I've gone through that too, like, I've tried to do EMDR. And like my brain, just like racks everywhere, where like, I can't concentrate enough on the bilateral stimulation. So it doesn't work that well, for me. So crossed off the list. And you know, you go to the next one. Like, I'm doing something now, parts work. Have you heard of parts work?

J James Geering 1:25:53

Actually, I haven't heard I haven't heard of that one. No.

 1:25:55

So I haven't like learned the education side of it. But just from experience, like, there's different parts in all of us, right? Like, there's the fear side, there's the protector, there's the rational side of us, and they all work, you know, they'll play their role. So like, for me, I've been doing some work. So like, I literally like this is I'll describe what I do. It's gonna sound crazy. But like, for me, like I jump into a black hole, and I fall down until I meet the person, I want to talk to the part of myself that I want to talk to, you know, I say I want to talk to fear. I'm trying to figure out why I do certain things like what is fear protecting me from, right, so I'm down there, and I'm talking to fear. And I start having a conversation with him in my head, and we just you go back and forth. I know, I sound like a crazy person. Now you go back, you go back and forth with fear. And you ask them questions to try and get some answers. And then once you get some answers from him, you go down, and you jumped down in the hole even further, and boom, you hit flat. And I started talking to, you know, another part of me. And when my therapist tried to do this with me, I'm like, No, fucking No. And I'm going through, and sometimes I'm like, this isn't saying that this works. And, and it's given me some answers. And there's some things that I'm looking for in therapy, and we get done. And then you know, we'll come, I'll get grounded or whatever. And we'll get that and I'm just like, This is insane. I'm like, I feel so weird doing this, but at the same time, like this is working so well. So, you know, just because something might sound and the purpose of that is just because you might think something's gonna be crazy. And you might feel a little weird doing it. You know, you got to be open to new things to as well.

J James Geering 1:27:40

Absolutely. I was introduced to a couple of things. Firstly, hypnotherapy which Courtney Starkey was on the show a few weeks ago, and she talked about, you know, it's not like, you immediately come out, you're like, Oh, my God, I feel so much better. It was a slow leaching of something new. And I talked to her about that. I've, I spoke to frank about this. For a long time, I leaned into alcohol just as a unwinding mechanism, which as we all know, when we dive into psychology is so wrong, but so I was never a binge drinker never drank to forget any of that stuff. But I just kind of you know, would have the one to a night and then that kind of messes up your sleep. And occasionally it would go to like three or four, because we my wife, and you know, we'd be like, okay, timeout, this is getting too much, and we'd be able to pull it back just fine. But the fact that you even need it at all, is still an issue. And so I've done two sessions with her, I would do another one this week. But I, for example, I haven't had a drink for a month now. And it's just because I don't want to, because I think it's starting to clear away the chaff that you know, and underneath, you're like, oh, there's a thing about with her just to the point where the feeling crazy. You're talking to like, alternate lives in the spidey verse that we all exist in, you know, the, if it truly is infinity, then there's James Geering doing 1000 Other things, you know, and you're talking to yourself at the same time, who's gone down a different path. And then you have what they called genius. I guess the the actual definition of genius is almost like a spirit guide. So you're talking to them, like, you know, I'm trying to write my second book and you say, All right, well then ask the genius, ask for help. You know, and you're like, oh,

okay, sounds crazy. But again, why the fuck not? You know what's crazy sitting in a dark room with a bottle of scotch? That's fucking crazy. If this shit will work, like you said, Get the ego down get your preconceived ideas and biases and throw him in a rubbish bin and just fucking go for it because what have you got to lose? If it works you're gonna look down and go, I can't believe went down a big black hole but fuck me it worked. So there we go.



1:29:42

And it's with like this kind of work to is like, I've been able to do it away from therapy as well. I found out what it's like, like we talked about like being triggered and whatnot, you know, from something that you're unexpected. Like, I found out that when it happens and you opened like kind of a Pandora's box to some experiences that you've been protecting yourself from. It can become like very real and very intrusive as the word, right. intrusive thoughts like, it feels so real, like it's all happening again. And some of the things that I've learned in session in therapy I've been able to use when some of this stuff happens when I'm out and about driving, and all of a sudden, for whatever reason, I'm triggered. And something that's happened in the past feels like it's happening right now, you know, some of these things you can use, like, away from therapy as well. And I've been able to do that, too. So the biggest thing you said is ego. Like, just check the ego, get rid of it, you know, it's not going to help you leave it at the door, and go in there with an open mind. And ask questions, you know, don't be afraid to ask, you know, the question was, you know, how do you find like the right therapist, like, what do you do, like, ask questions, you know, don't be afraid to ask questions as to why you're doing this. Like, I asked, like, why are we doing this? Like, what's the benefit? You know? And you know, you get the answers. If you don't like the answers, okay? Maybe it's not for you, whatever. But don't give it a shot. Like you said, What, you have to lose nothing. If it doesn't work. Okay. Back to the drawing board.



James Geering 1:31:13

Yeah, try something else. There's so many options. And it's funny how people have had success in all kinds of things, like I said, psychedelics and ketamine and some of those surfing, hiking, you know, women's retreats, you know, and then traditional stuff, and then some people, even pharmaceuticals, to get them through a certain path, maybe that's, that's a temporary band aid that will get you to the point where you can start delving into the trauma should never be a long term thing, in my opinion, unless you truly have some, you know, biochemical thing that cannot be addressed any other way. But, you know, it's still at all if you're an absolute crisis, and it will kind of bring you down to where you can start actually interacting with the counselor, beautiful, just make sure you have an exit strategy with the drug.



1:31:57

And that's what's really weird, like therapy and stuff like that, like, I don't go every week sometimes, because I don't need to, in order to me, but that's what's great about like building a good rapport and therapeutic relationship with a therapist or counselor, whatever, is I know, when I do need to go back and I do feel, you know, off and things are triggering me if I can't handle it on my own, I know that I'm able to, you know, go in there and start to work again. But you know, it doesn't have to be every single week, you know, once you've kind of started, you

know, healing and whatnot. Like, some guys think like, oh, if I go to therapy, like I'm gonna be, when do I get out? Like, am I gonna get therapy forever, like, people gonna think I'm crazy? No, you know what I mean? Like, I remember, I had a conversation with my mom. And I was like, Yeah, you know, I'm still in therapy, or whatever. And this is like, two years after the incident. And she was like, why? And I was like, Well, I like it. You know, but like, it's just, some people don't understand that it's okay to be in there long term. You know what I mean? It's not just like a go in, and you're gonna fix everything. Yeah, there's work involved. And then, like I said, when the work is done, and things are status quo, and things are good in life, don't go back. If you don't need to work, continue, you know, it's a personal choice.

 James Geering 1:33:13

I have a guest who's a friend of mine, Dina Ali, she's a firefighter in rally actually in North Carolina. And one of the things she said was, if we can actually figure out the community, again, the conversation, the the kitchen table in the firehouse and get it back to how it used to be, then we may not need peer support anymore, because we're organically peer support. You know, I don't think that the pygmies, you know, in Uganda have a peer support program. They are a tribe that's cohesive, and they take care of each other. And, you know, it's, it's inbuilt into their tribal kind of way of life. I think, because we've deviated so far from that, I think, yeah, maybe one day, you know, a lot of us won't need as much counseling, because we'll have that kind of lower grade, continuous counseling within the home within the community within the workplace. But what's so sad is at the moment, there's so much division, and I would argue, you know, a lot of normal people in the middle aren't divided, but we're exposed to so much division and clickbait and anger and all this stuff. So, we're in an environment that's setting people up to fail even more than ever, but these last, you know, six or so years where there's been a deliberate attempt to divide people on anything you can find whether it's massive vaccines to race to a religion, to immigration, you name it, pick aside. We push against that and rebuild community and see people as people, I think that, you know, they'll always be those professions that are there that we need as well, but I think there'll be a lot more healing within that tribal community as well.

 1:34:47

Well like to talk about rescue responders like that's kind of like where, like, that's what we want to do. Like everybody deals with things differently, right. Like some people may not need therapy like some people may be able to go into the ocean and surf like you said, and that's how they handle, you know, seeing something shitty, and that works for them great. Other people can't, but maybe fishing works for somebody, you know, great. Like, there's a million things that people can do to handle stress anxiety. There isn't like just a one way path to recovery. And recovery is not just, you know, from substance abuse, it can be from anything. And that's where like, we stress that there's multiple paths to recovery. And we'll help you find those, you know, like, we're not like you need to be in meetings, like AAA is the best thing ever, because the meeting is styles that we run, they're not AAA meetings, you know, like, we talk about a variety of things from physical health, metabolic health, nutrition, sprinkling some recovery talking there, because there are people in recovering there as well. But that's, you know, we try and cover every single basis and make it known to people like, there's multiple paths to recovery here, like, you know, you can explore some different options. And if those things don't work, well, maybe then you need to look into maybe seeing a

therapist or getting some counseling, you know, but it's not like you had you have to go right into therapy, or you need to be like, for me, like you need to be right into an inpatient program. You know, like, Well, no, I don't, or why do you think that you know what I mean, there's multiple paths to recovery, you just need to find you need to find the one that works?

J James Geering 1:36:26

Absolutely. Well, I want to be mindful of your time. So I'm gonna throw some quick closing questions at you. The first one, is there a book? Or are there books that you love to recommend it can be related to our discussion today, or completely unrelated.

i 1:36:41

So I'm not a big book guy, I'll be completely honest with you. Extreme Ownership by Jocko Willick is a good one. I read that through, I took away a lot from that book, because owning your mistakes, and owning your fuck ups is a very hard thing to do. But that book will teach you a lot about leadership as well, which is an important quality to me. So I'd highly recommend that book for anybody, especially like if you're a leadership position. If you have any type of rank or anything like that, like read the book, learn how to get people's respect, learn how to have people, you know, do what you would like them to do, without just telling them to do it. You know what I mean? don't respect that. And you might like this one, so I just read the rescuer Jason Soto. I just read that book. I'd recommend that book. There's a lot of firefighter stories in there, obviously, but doing a little research on him and kind of digging into him now. I would definitely recommend that book to anybody, especially first responders is a good one. I just wrote a paper on it. Actually, I actually had to like diagnose, go through DSM five and find a diagnosis and everything like that. So it was an interesting book like that.

J James Geering 1:38:08

Yeah, he leaned heavily into his faith as well. So that's you know, another another one of the tools in that toolbox some people you know, the the face side might be Jesus has a plan for you. God has a plan for you doesn't work for some people, for other people that are deeply embedded in a certain faith that might be the very thing that actually you know, turns the corner for them.

i 1:38:27

Yeah, and that's awesome for them like you said, faith might be for somebody may not be for someone but if you can find you know, if you can heal from faith, have that believe in whatever you want to believe them?

J James Geering 1:38:37

Absolutely. All right. Well, then same kind of question. What about a film a movie and or a documentary?



1:38:45

I don't want what I'm gonna say is it like, it's not gonna help anyway, it's just a good documentary



James Geering 1:38:49

doesn't matter. You can say the bobby movie if you want.



1:38:53

Now, have some time watched documentary on Woodstock? Not the like the original one. The second one would like Limp Biscuit and like corn. Is that the one that failed? Is that right? Oh, yeah. Fail. Yeah, Philip, big time. If you grew up in that era, like if you grew up in that era, that you need to watch that documentary because it's gonna blow your mind. Fucked up. What happened down there?



James Geering 1:39:16

Okay, beautiful. Yeah, I've never seen that one fire either. That was about some big party. That never happened. That was a big scam, I think.



1:39:23

Yeah, firefly saw that one as well. Is that good. The Woodstock one was a lot better.



James Geering 1:39:28

Okay. Brilliant. All right. Well, the next question, is there a person that you recommend that come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world? Yeah.



1:39:44

I don't want to butcher his last name. His name's Jason. He's part of reps. Is I IG handle is the real Jump Man. Jay.



James Geering 1:39:53

Jay has been on here. Jay has already been on the show. Yep.



1:39:58

All right. Oh, good for you that Forget him on here. I need to go again, which is fine. There's a guy up here in New Jersey, his name is Brian gilepsy.



1:40:12

He's retired CEO in recovery, does a ton of good work for first responders is incredibly knowledgeable as an awesome story. I would recommend him, come on here. I think a lot of first responders, whether you have you know, any type of substance abuse problem or not be able to take something away from what he has to offer from what he has to say,



James Geering 1:40:35

you know, I think that's a big thing, too. When we when we have these conversations, it's not just about the addiction as someone's whole lifespan, which is why I asked the early life questions as well. Sometimes it's traumatic sometimes it's it's a beautiful upbringing, you know, but it's, this is the thing to you're not defined by your addiction, which I think is I was thinking this the other day, there's people that as you were talking about, they tell their story, week in week out, they tore, you know, fire departments or whatever it is. And you always kind of ask the question, when do you move on? When does that stop being your identity you are in this fire, or this shooting or whatever. And you've told the story, because I've had guests that were like, James is I'm I'm doing your podcast, and this is it. I'm done. Because I'm tired of living there. And I need to move on. And even though Brian Mackenzie, who's a big, big in the kind of Strength Conditioning and breath world, he was saying the same with AAA, he's like, it worked for me incredibly, but one day, I was like, I don't want to keep going because I don't want to be reminded of that I've moved on now. So interesting perspectives depending on the individual.



1:41:38

Yeah, I mean, I said yeah, I said it before, like, I was telling you too much and I was triggered myself. So I stopped for a while until I felt comfortable and ready to go ahead and start again. So



James Geering 1:41:51


yeah, yeah, but again, the whole the person's whole timeline, that's a whole different thing. And if you can find different ways to have conversations, so you're not just dragging them down the same path every time hopefully it's much more interesting for them as well. All right, well then we talked about vicarious trauma. What do you do to decompress





1:42:09


so I love the ocean and I love the beach. It used to be like I used to think going to the gym was

so I love the ocean and I love the beach. it used to be like I used to think going to the gym was my way to decompress but like going to the gym now and like working out like it's just like part of who I am it's part of my like my weekly daily routine. So like I did a lot of work on how to like on how to decompress and I just found that like being on the beach. Like just listening to waves like is like the only time I feel calm you know where I can shut things down and really just like be present in the moment you know for me like all day, I'm just like go go go go go you know like I have no stop but for whatever reason like when I'm on a beach and I just sit and just listen to the waves like everything slows down that's like my my place to decompress and I'll do it like I've done it at three in the morning before where for whatever reason I was anxious have anxiety about something and I'll drive down the beach like home I live in our way I got drove down the beach and sat and just decompressed and almost got ran over by the thing that's breaking this

 James Geering 1:43:13
ended up in the paper again

 1:43:17
but yeah, that's that's been my thing has to be just common you know,

 James Geering 1:43:23
I'm exactly the same as you are Beach is just under two hours away there's this closer ones but there's this one called Crescent Beach south of the Sun Augustine here and there's something about the energy there it's amazing and the wintertime I'll be able to run my dog and it's pretty quiet and I will walk for like you know, two two and a half miles one way and then walk the other way back and just the energy and even when we're lucky in Florida we have cruises and they're everywhere you know and they're cheap if you're a Florida resident so the same thing I'll pay for the one that has the balcony and I'll just sit out there and drink coffee and I don't need to be doing the conga up on the pool deck I want to be down there with the quiet you know watching the selfish and and just chillin so yeah, I totally understand

 1:44:03
it should it's the ocean whatever whatever it is out there. It's just does it for me.

 James Geering 1:44:09
Absolutely. All right well then for people listening I'm sure you know there's a lot of people that would love to reach out to you learn more about reps and you know maybe even one day be one of your your clients. So where are the best places to find reps online and then what about yourself on social media?



1:44:25

So reps, you can find us online through Instagram. It's just at rest for responders is the handle need to look up my handle is just sad because I should know it by heart by now. But I'm fairly positive is Nick underscore RFR four and just shoot me a DM like my phone is pretty much always on me. I get back to everybody and same thing is with the reps account. Just shoot the account a DM somebody will get back to you and someone reach out to you.



James Geering 1:44:58

Beautiful Well Nick, I want to say Thank you. I mean, as we talked about courageous vulnerability, the people that come on here and drop the facade, you know, we're honest and then they'd have to if you've never had trauma, you know, be in a dark place and that's fine. That's not the facade that's reality, but most of us have most of us have had some some pretty deep lows in our life. So for you to come on, though and talk about alcohol specifically. I know there were pills as well, but I think that's the elephant in the room. You know, we look down on those. Oh, this guy's on on meth. This guy's on, you know, on heroin. Yeah, but we're all on booze and no one's talking about that. So I think it's a very important and courageous conversation. So I want to thank you so so much for coming on the show today.



1:45:38

Absolutely. I'm happy to be here. And like I said, anybody ever needs I just shouldn't do