

Rob Ramirez - Episode 783

Fri, Jun 16, 2023 5:41PM 2:37:56

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fire, people, call, rescue, years, firefighter, ended, fire department, training, fort myers beach, day, school, area, story, great, ambulance, building, ems, paramedic, father

SPEAKERS

James Geering, Rob Ramirez

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, veteran firefighter, Special Operations member and teacher with the National rescue consultants Rob Ramirez. Now I've had a host of people on this podcast many whom have a story career and when it comes to the world of firefighting, I would argue that Rob's career has hit many of the pinnacle events over the last couple of decades. So we discuss a host of topics from his journey into the fire service, responding to the special needs community as a first responder, Hurricane Katrina, the Parkland shooting, hurricane in the surf, side collapse, mental health, firefighter, fitness, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredible 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 other people to find. And this is a free library of almost 800 guests. 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 Rob Ramirez enjoy. For Rob, I want to start by saying thank you so much for taking the time and coming on the behind the shield podcast today.

R Rob Ramirez 01:54

Well, thank you for having me the honor legit, it's all mine. Appreciate the phone call. I appreciate the invite. And I'm ecstatic to be here. Well, it's

J James Geering 02:01

funny. There's a lot of people whose names come up over and over and over again and with the number of guests that I have. The universe always spits it out when the time is right. And so here we are.



02:11

Yeah, absolutely. I could I went through your list of guests and I have no idea what I'm doing here. But I appreciate the the opportunity.



James Geering 02:17

It's funny. I just had Steve Gillespie on who's retired FDNY firefighter, amazing, powerful story. He lost a whole bunch of his squat company in 911. He was there at the the Black Sunday. Last Sunday. Yeah. But he or she, he hates that name as the 170/8 Street fire. Black Sunday was a term that the media given him. But he will again, the story career. Special Operations FDNY and he's like, I don't know why I'm here with all the other guests on my all the guests say the same thing. That's humility, though. That's the kind of person I love coming on the show.



02:51

Amen. Amen. I totally understand. I know you



James Geering 02:54

do, too. So where on planet earth are we finding you today?



02:59

We are finding me in Miami, Florida actually working out of my mom's house today. We have a little issue going on in my house with the baby and some overseas a COVID. And so it's still a thing apparently. And I'm working here today because I did not want to cancel our date. I don't know when our next availability is so make sure I made it happen.



James Geering 03:18

And tell me again, which countries were visited before this horrendous disease.



03:22

She was in Scotland in Ireland.



James Geering 03:24

Okay, so the Celtic virus is going to be the next the next media run.



 03:30

Oh, next strain,

 James Geering 03:31

they gotta isolate all gingers.

 03:33

College injuries are going to be in addition to that regardless. With all due respect to other Ginger's listening,

 James Geering 03:39

I can say that because I have Pugin Jeromy. So, you know, no one can be offended by James Geering saying that, just so you know. That's awesome. All right. Well, I would like to start at the very beginning of your timeline. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic, what your parents did, and how many siblings?

 03:59

Very cool. So this is the first time I've ever had the opportunity to do this in a podcast. So I'm actually pretty excited about just talking about my family history other than just work. So thank you for that question. And this opportunity, James, my father and mother have both immigrated to the United States from Cuba. And so they're both Cuban born parents. Father came to this country in 1967, shortly after the revolution in a war that he served in, in Cuba, and once they lost that he had to the classic Cuban story. He had to it's like a movie, almost believe it or not. And he went through all the trials and tribulations of being on the losing side of the military, who per se, and when the communist regime took over Cuba. He was hiding out, basically, for lack of better terms and people's basements and homes. His brothers were assassinated for serving as well. In my grandmother's recipes, home, they were looking for him all over he was able to find a way out to Mexico. from Cuba, and eventually made it out of the island country and into the United States, and ended up in Florida, in 1967. But he was running from the whole military assassination attempt from like 60 to 65. And then my mother ended up coming over here in 1970. So about three years after that, and they actually actually met in the United States, and got married in the US, and had my sister and I, I'm the oldest of two I was a younger sister was way smarter than me. She's a, she's a doctor in his speech pathology. And she is the pride and joy of our family. I want to became a firefighter, and a paramedic. And we both on Well, we both don't well, I have two boys. One is Gavin. Gavin is 15 years old from my first marriage and Gavin is a special needs, which has taught me a ton about myself, for humility, challenge, being a caretaker and a father, relating the job stress to home stress and an understanding when I go on these calls, throughout my career, how it feels for the receiving end parent to need help with their child, because they're chronically ill, Gavin did the walk or talk or feed himself or take care of himself as a 15 year old. So that's even my pride and joy. And now I have it, believe it or not, I have a 10 month old who turned 10 months old yesterday, from my new relationship, and he's a bundle of joy. And he's great. His name is Nash and a sh.

And he is a homerun by all senses of the word. But I am in a perpetual state of fatigue and tired between work, baby Gavin work baby Gavin. And doing this kind of stuff on the side keeps me really, really busy. But I wouldn't change it for the world. Again, that's my story. And I'm proud of it.

J

James Geering 06:51

If it was a hell of a story, I want to go back to your dad for a second. What did he talk about as far as the conditions that were going on in Cuba back then? I mean, he talks about obviously, the extreme violence that happened after but you know, what were the conditions that he was living in and what made him pick up arms and try and fight against that regime.

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07:10

My father was born in, in a part of Cuba, a very rural, very country where we were compared to you in the States, very country, very rural area. Parents have done a farm, he the one of the six brothers, and a sister, you know, back then everybody had a bunch of kids. And he actually enlisted before records were kept as a 16 year old in the military, and he faked his age, to be of age, which was 18, his older brother, my uncle present beasts, he was already enlisted in the military at the time. And the dictator or president during my father's childhood, it was up above Batista. It was last name. And he wasn't part of that military. When Castro and his cronies started the revolutionary process and, and attacks on Cuba and getting starting to take over the military and, and doing what they were doing with a guerrilla warfare for what's called guerrilla warfare. A my father's brother and then went to fight and my father being a patriotic 16 year old Cuban fit from the country. No big pick his age and board and, and he was part of that war process for the entirety of the revolution. He he very rarely spoke of it, just like you would think about guys that were served in the military, either where you're from, or in the US, or these guys have served in Korea, or Vietnam, or even the World War Two, you know, the greatest generation, those guys, they rarely talk about what they did during that time. But the few conversations my dad has been that now since 2009, he passed away. And a few conversations that Dad and I had growing up with a child are very, very good parents. And he would like to talk to me about stories about the hardships but how proud he was to be part of that process, the losing the how he would do it all over again. He talked to me about being on the run here that his brothers were built. His mother forcing him out of the country, she wanted him to leave, because she didn't want to lose another son. And she rather know that he was gone. And not knowing she would never see him again in another country, but that he was alive and able to recreate a life of his own. The difficulties of those decisions, leaving his family behind. Those stories were always present for me growing up, and I valued, what he gave up for me to have the opportunity that I have today. And tremendously something that I will never be able to do for my child. Thank God, the world that we live in today, and we're all born and raised. But my father had to do so much just to give to my sister and I and our family. You have to understand my dad also left the island of Cuba and never once went back ever once and he died in the US and I never met aunts, uncles, grandparents, any One of my father's side. So I only knew my father from my father's side. And my mother's family actually migrated over here. So my all my aunts and uncles, and cousins and grandparents are only from my mother's side of my father's family was never able to leave the island. And they all ended up dying of old age there. And he never went back and visited because he had made a promise that he would never return to Cuba until communism was gone. And unfortunately, he passed away before

that happened. So his story is a story of resilience and a story of, you know, sacrifice for lack of words. And what he gave us is priceless, he gave me an opportunity to grow up in a country where anything is possible, and appreciate everything that we do have, whether the politics or your side or not, or whatever, is happening in today's world, and whatever media driven agenda we're dealing with, I always remained focus and never lose sight of how grateful I am to be a part of this society in this country. Because, man, if my father would have not done what he did, I wouldn't be here today, having this conversation with you. That's 100%

 James Geering 11:08

This is what's so sad. You mentioned the world war two generation, especially because we've lost them. And you've obviously lost your father now, but so many of these warriors, whether they fought, you know, for the UK, the US or whether it was, you know, overseas, the old generation also had that, that kind of barrier down mentality, because that's what they thought was normal back then. Now, we're realizing that that was a seed growing inside them. And if only they were able to have the conversations that for example, we're probably going to have today, maybe they will be able to offload some of that trauma. Because if he held that on, and he lost his entire family and his country, and never was able to return, I mean, that must have been horrendous for him.

 11:48

I can't even imagine the burden, but I cannot. And to tell you that I saw my father's sad won't give his life and be like demon. I never saw that man sad. I never saw that man feel sorry for himself openly. And he never showed any evidence of sign from the day that I met him and I was born to that they are very, not once did he show any form of for me, that generation did not show that they just didn't show it. And I know what he had to deal with an attorney because and about the generation doing and why that's what makes us all the same. His body and mind process just like yours, the mind that and he must have dealt with it. However he dealt with it. And I don't even want to even go down that wormhole because of the trauma and pain that I would have to feel for what he felt. But men to him for me to tell you that he complained you want that behind? I want you to hear that men complain about damn thing ever.

 James Geering 12:40

Hazing? Well, the very first fire department I worked for was Hialeah, which I think was like 98% Cuban. Did your family find themselves there at all on their journey? Yeah.

 12:52

Absolutely. 100%. Hialeah is like a vantage point. Oh,

 James Geering 12:57

it is it is it's a perfect place for you know, English non Spanish speaking firefighter to start his career opposite where you should be. It was good. It was nice to feel like a minority though

career opposite where you shouldn't be. It was good. It was nice to feel like a minority though. That was that was one thing.

 13:11

I believe it. I believe it. How will you join the United States arts or was after you left early? I was.

 James Geering 13:16

Yeah, it was. It was good. I was only I was a little bit older. I was 27. So but my God, that department back then it was 2004 when I joined the actual department and the training was incredible. And we'll get into that. But the bar that was set for that particular hiring process was ridiculous.

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And to this day, to their credit, and I know I'm gonna have Hylia guys listening, they have a ton of high speed guys. They just have a very, very strong Fire Department culture and their training either. Amazing, actually, you know, just to finish Hylia conversation. My last driver on my truck with Eugene Gonzalez, I'll drop his name on there just taking give it a listen, you're gonna get a lot of that. And he was a retired, already retired once when he joined our fire department. And he retired to the City of Hialeah, cheaper training and went to work somewhere else because he couldn't get enough of the fire service. And then we hired him and he took a job with a driver engineer and have a driver engineer who retired after 25 plus years with the City of Hialeah. The chief of training driving me around was amazing. I was a student as a captain, and he was still the instructor as my driver.

 James Geering 14:30

I wonder find your chief got I think it was chief Godfrey was the the training chief when I was there, but uh, yeah, phenomenon. All right, well, then go back to your childhood for a second. You ended up in a very physical profession. What were you doing as far as athletics and sports during the school age?

 14:46

Oh, very cool. Um, grew up playing baseball and judo. And jujitsu before jujitsu. What the thing I was called to do, right back when I had braces and I couldn't wear a mouthpiece because I couldn't breathe when I was getting spit out my mouthpiece and ended up with my lips and tongue stuck to my braces from a frickin poor chokehold or a headlock. But I grew up playing baseball the good Cuban kid would. That's a national pastime with Cuba, not only less, and I played baseball from the time I was probably able to walk three, four years old. Up until my freshman year of college. I played baseball non stop in high school as well. In high school, I actually, just for my own shits and giggles, I joined the football team. I was like, I just kind of

played football to close. The crowd is so much bigger. And Deion Sanders is doing it in production, we're doing it. So I'm not gonna replay I'm gonna play baseball and football. And the coaches both frowns upon it. But I did it for one year. Now that pretty cool, high school experience. And I'm talking about American football, not what we refer to as football everywhere else in the world, including Cuba. So exactly. And in your neck of the woods as well. Right. So the martial arts part was great. That was my father's doing. He's like, Listen, you got to know how to fight, you know. And he took me and put me in martial arts my whole life up until I graduated from high school. And then I just couldn't do it anymore, because I started focusing on my fire service career. But definitely being sports oriented, team oriented, locker room oriented. And, guys, I hear it all the time, it was a seamless transition for that component of the fire service I yearned for that I needed it needed to be in an environment where he depended on each other. And they maintained that I'm part of a team mentality. And the fire service, my first exposure to the fire service was like, holy cow, I'm back in the football locker room. I'm back baseball team. I'm back at football practice, when I'm on the drill ground. It was it all makes sense to me logically. So with an easy transition, it was a very linear process that I have to go left to go right straight.

J

James Geering 17:00

So what element did the martial arts play and the reason I asked that I played team sports all the way through to college, but then I've been a martial artist most of my life as well, when you're on the mat, even if you're part of a taekwondo team, or whatever it is, at that moment, it's on you. And you can't blame anyone else. You can't say they didn't pass it to you properly, or, you know, whatever. You either trained enough or you haven't. So I found that an interesting contrast to the experience of being part of a team of the ownership of an individual sport as well.



17:29

You know what, I've never even thought about it that way. But you do need for martial arts, like you said, Whatever you prepare for, you're not going to be able to do when the fight starts. And you're and that combat sport, from my last experience in combat sports is 2627 years ago, you know, it was my freshman year, my son, my senior year high school. And so, you know, I just remember, when I lost, I felt unprepared. And when I won, I felt completely prepared. And that may transition over to my at some level in my psyche, the way that I prepare for the fire service. When it comes to skills and drills, I also became very comfortable, engaging with other human beings that I did not know, I felt very comfortable touching and grabbing other human beings that I did not know, things that as a kid are not normal. As part of society, we avoid each other, we give social space, appropriate social space, you don't touch strangers, you don't talk to strangers. But yet in the world of martial arts, whether it was in combat or, or in practice, we're constantly training with people that we don't know what we just met. And you're and you have to become comfortable with a feeling you know, my fourth year of force, your strength, my strength, your your weaknesses, my strengths, my strengths, your weaknesses, and all that gets exposed, exploited immediately any form of combat sport. So I believe that that has something to do with the level of preparation, the way that I create my mental algorithms where this is where I'm going to force the door. This is where I'm going to stretch a line. This is why it's important because when I'm on Allegan, and I'm on the floor, it's one on one, it's me

versus the door. The whole team is not holding the halligan with me. Right? But I'm still part of the team because if I suck, then they're not going to be able to do their job. So our release comes right back. Is that chain effect?

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James Geering 19:19

Absolutely. Well, you mentioned the fire service. Then when you were in the school age, was that where you were dreaming of becoming or was there something prior?

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19:26

No, like every good kid wants to be professional athlete. I wasn't I wasn't I didn't hate school games. But I wasn't into school. Some guys were like, oh, you know, I hated school. I hated school. I hated school. I never hated school. It just wasn't for me. I went there. I pass the test. I did. Well, I got I went through the motions. I didn't hate it. But I was whatever about it, if whatever was the feeling, but as far as what I wanted to do after that year, I was confident in an environment with Bethany. From the guys, we're all talking. And I was the first adult male in my family to go to high school in the US. So that alone, there wasn't a roadmap. I didn't have a Walmart to look at my pet, like, Hey, Dad, will you do in high school? He's like, I'd fight in the war, you know? Exactly. Like why would you do that? I shot rifles at people in the mountains know exactly. I'm here trying to play baseball. And so I tried to play baseball. I tried out for many teams and colleges and walked onto a couple of places. I ended up hurting myself twice in the process. And a buddy of mine bugs to this day, the good friend of mine, he works with a man he works for Miami Dade Fire Rescue now. He and his father, his father was a firefighter from Miami Dade. And he was also a an explorer or a dinette coordinator, advisor, his father, so my buddy tells me Hey, man, after baseball practice, I'm gonna go to the fire station and hang out with my dad. I'm part of this program called explorers. And that's when you want to come out. I had no interest in being a firefighter, but I needed a ride home. So I went to him. And exactly how we're talking. Right, here we are. So I ended up this is my son, this is my junior year high school 11th grade, I end up going to this fire station immediately. Um, you know, if you believe in divine intervention, I ended up with the red fire station with the right group with the right eyes to talk to an 11th grade kid from the street has no interest in the visors and everything right away. They talk to me, every single person in the firehouse to engage me how they welcomed me and the way they interacted with each other, my presence. And I left her thinking that this baseball doesn't work out. I don't know what these guys do. But this is the poor job and one of the guys told me Listen, you gotta go to college for this, you gotta go take classes. This is what I did. And I'm like, even better, even better, because I know what I My family never been to college. I'm the first one in high school, you know, so we ended up using that to go right into the Explorer program, 11th grade, and my mom found out about it. She's like, Listen, this is perfect. When you're not playing baseball, baseball season, you're gonna be at a fire station riding on those ambulances. And she would drop me off at these meetings on Tuesdays and Fridays, I believe. And then had one weekend a month, like the reserves and I'll go write a different firehouses and be there for 12 hours. And then that turned into me creating relationships with the guys falling in love with the job and ended up actually paying for my minimum standards. They got together providing the uniforms SCBAs everything I needed. And the Explorer program for Miami Dade paid for five of us full scholarship to go to fire school right after graduation. So I graduated high school in June. And in September, just a couple of months later, was day one for fire academy for me, all expenses paid.



James Geering 22:55

So I know when you wear your uniform, it doesn't say Miami Dade on the shoulder. So we'll meet through a Miami Dade sponsored Fire Academy and how that took you to your department.



23:05

So when we when the Miami Dade sponsored Fire Academy happened, this is in the 90s in the mid mid 90s 9696. This was and in 96 the fire service market was so so difficult to get into the industry daunting was just so competitive in the late 90s in between 90 and 2000. And I'd say 567 religious am near impossible to get a job down here if you weren't a firefighter, paramedic, and even then you go put it in for a job anywhere even say like like in Hialeah for for example, up 500 people and they're hiring seven, eight, maybe 10 people, you know, Miami Dade County with a selection process made by computerized lottery system during that entire era. So yes, they put me through the fire academy. They couldn't even get me into their own Fire Academy because Miami Dade did not have a fire academy. We didn't attend at that time. It was either go to Robert Fire Academy, which is in the city of AB and in the Broward County area or go up to Ocala to the Florida State Fire College. Right. Joe had never been to LA in my life at that point. No eight year old kid parents from Cuba had never left Miami Hialeah, hey, you're going to go anywhere north that was just like, well, we're just going to Rando, come on. Let's get let's calm down. So you had to pay tolls the quarters back then, and we would have a lot of quarters later in the house. So as we're doing this, where my mom and I are planning where we're going to do my next movement of bringing stay, my father ended up going to the US and becoming a butcher. He was a career butcher. He taught me for a living. That's all he did. And he was a damn good butcher. Actually, I have a tattoo on my chest that says Son of a butcher. I'm very proud of being a blue collared son, and my father would never ever anybody would tell me, not to better than me. So you gotta do better than me, you can't be a budget, but I'm a loser. I'm a loser. I work, I'm a loser. I didn't study, I can't write and read, I fought in a war, I have to come meet, you don't ever want to call me go to school. So when he passed, I put it on my chest. Because the rest of my life, I will always look in the mirror and know that I'm the son of a butcher. And I did. And I'm proud of him, even though he wasn't. There's something that I'm very that I hold very, very dear to myself. And so, back to the story, let me take one heading coming into a fire academy with the other five guys in the city of Fort Myers, Florida. So we ended up going to the West Coast about a two hour drive from where I live to Fort Myers, across the state, do West. And we ended up in a fire academy in the city of Fort Myers. And I was there for full time Monday through Friday for for three months at the time. And December of 1996. I graduated from from Fire Academy, came back to Miami, and started an EMT and paramedic school, finished that in 98. And it took me from 98 to 2000. To get my first fire department job. In 2000, I ended up getting a job with the city of Hallandale Beach, and Broward County. And then the following year post 911, I ended up working with the city that I'm at now, which I'm just going to leave it like that city I'm at now. And I've been with them since then. And it's been great. It was great and small, to medium sized fire departments, there was five fire houses than six. And we've been going through a lot of changes the last couple of years. And, and it was really, really good. When I got on there, I've got a lot for a small department, I got a lot of fire experience. We were getting a lot of work in the beginning of my career. We pulled up the numbers, you know a couple years ago and my first four or five years, we you know, they were averaging over 100 fires a year structure fires a year, a big, you know,

your regular four pack structure fires, but not even knowing it. I thought that was the norm for everybody else at the time. Without even knowing it. I was building a very solid base and learning what I didn't know and being exposed to things that I would carry with me when fire did slow down, which they eventually did. And 56 years into my career, after everything, everything slowed down. And I now have that base to draw from when I think back at what I was where I am now to where I was when I started. I didn't know. But my transition from the state from the Miami Dade Fire Rescue explorer, in 11th grade at the age of like 16 to the 45 year old man and today really put me through through my entire adult maturity process. I always joke about getting the fire department as years of my life and being raised in the fire department. But I'm not kidding. My father worked as a butcher full time my mother worked who worked as a licensed medical licensed nurse. And she went to school while I was in school. And she put herself through school and work nights. And my sister needed most of the attention she was younger. So I ended up doing a lot of stuff on my own. And then working in the fire service was the first time I met men that were third, fourth, fifth generation firefighters, as I grew up in the States, guys that had alternative opportunities and things to teach me and talk to me about them. That was not getting to my family because I just knew the immigrant process. And these men put a lot of effort into my development. And anything that I do today, always goes back to them because without them and without the entire story. And none of them nothing that I'm accomplishing that they are or that I've accomplished, you know, the last 56 years of my life would have ever happened. And I'm very, very aware of that. I'm very aware very thankful for those opportunities. And I'm not just saying that because I'm supposed to say I genuinely love and respect those men like if they were my father figure, or they think a 20 year old kid from Hialeah and turn them into a 45 year old man with a family

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James Geering 29:13

well first it's an amazing journey that you've been through highly like I said was my very first apartment and again I credit those men and women for just forging the bar like welding that bar and saying this is where it's supposed to be your entire career and it's funny because you very very seldom do I have Florida firefighters on here but you talked about what our certification is called minimum standards. And it's something that I joke about a lot is a lot of kind of conversation in our less aggressive firefighters that there was like the glory days as your uncle Rico moment is your fire academy I was in great shape then that they fucking labeled it for us they said you cannot be any more shit than you are right now. And higher layer put that you know shit bar super super high. We will hire them concert class 50% of the class were actually civilians, they went through fire and EMT, the rest of us are already certified. So they beat the shit out of us for three months straight, excellent fire training, excellent physical training, excellent paramedic training, they were using capnography and all kinds of stuff, you know, the Mad device way, way back in oath. Oh 304 when that came into my career and other departments like a decade later, so I credit those incredible people for setting the bar so damn high for us, and then also not allowing it to lower if we didn't reach that bar, you know, then then you will go on, which is something I think that we've lost in the fire service a little bit.

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Even Emma Yeah, Haley has always had that great reputation. They really have and and I wasn't planning on talking about Hialeah today. But and they have a really good reputation. The fire department actually have a cousin that works there. And he's been a little tender with


the city. And he is, and I tell him all the time, she has a great poultry great department. And they've had hardships like everybody else has its cycle, politically and financially and collective bargaining. But man when it comes to like, providing service and user receiving top quality, farm and ship and Paramedicine those guys are top of the hill, in my opinion there for a long time. We're winning Clint Kohn competitions with medical competitions in the late 90s, early 2000s. They had fire instructors represented every fire academy in South Florida for many years. Those guys are great. And if you're going to start anywhere, that would a great place to start. Good for you.

 James Geering 31:30

Absolutely. Well, the other thing just to underline as well, you touched on the political cycle. I mean, they've they've been hammered. They really haven't they they've done really well, considering that there was one point a guy I think he was like a District Chief when I was there or BC, he ended up becoming the chief and was basically willing to give up an entire shift. Now this is a three shift platoon already. So there was willing to cut an entire shift for the city rather than actually stand up for the firefighters. So I love that that department, I advocate for them because they should be paid a lot more they should be given a lot more support. And they have still held the line despite To be honest, being completely shafted by the department lots of times

 32:12

have a history of that has never changed and nurturing from the 90s of the day, every every feels like every three, four or five years during the same process of losing members fighting certainly the city mass layoffs, and this is the fire upon the people that are listening that do at work. These guys have heavy urban area, heavy fire nodes, if you follow them on social media, so you highly, they're they're putting off big fires quite often. And they're running a lot a lot of medical calls every year. These guys are in the 1000s of 1000s of calls every year.

 James Geering 32:45

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, I forget the population. But there were there were very small square mileage but the density of that population. Yeah. Outside of high rises. extremely dense. Very dense brother. Absolutely. All right, well, then. So you have this, you know, this amazing kind of path as far as as far as your dad's you know, amazing, powerful story, the humility that he's got the the sense of patriotism was instilled with him. You find yourself now in your current department, walk me through from a fire service point of view, what really got fuel that fire that was already burning in you, but but really kind of lit it so that you started becoming on the path to be a fire service leader rather than simply a member of a

 33:30

crew. So I always loved the opportunity to teach. I at an early age realized that in order for me to get better, I needed to know the information put enough to make someone else better. And I found great satisfaction from helping others develop. It wasn't something that I was aware of,

like, cognitively right in the beginning. But you know, hindsight being 2020 The more I look back at the beginning of my career, I've been asked that before, and I've asked myself, Why do I do this? Why do I have this passion that drives me to do these things and talk and teeth and an age and care about people's success and wanting to see people come up to become the best version of themselves possible in the fire service? I don't have to do that. You don't have to do that. Right. But I cannot do that. Because then I'll lose a tiny part of myself. And I don't know where that came from James in the beginning. Honestly, I just found great satisfaction and seeing people get better. People around me get better. And passing on what I knew was of the utmost importance to me. And learning new information was important to me. I got put on a shift when I started my current Fire Department. That was freaking lights out. Man. These guys were so good at their jobs. They were so ready and so proficient and I hear I have some freaking kid from Miami shows up in Broward County where I work now. And I showed up and I walked in the door thinking, listen, I've been doing this since I was in 11th grade, here we are five years later, I've stretched toe that forced doors and went to fire academy. I did well, in paramedic school. I'm not going to have a hard time, the real learning curve, I have to learn your policies and your procedures. But I'm not going to have a hard time. And man was wrong. When I showed up there had so much to learn, these guys were so much better than me at everything they did, their efficiency, their understanding their mental algorithms, the way that they learned when they taught and interacted, the way that they ran calls, how they just everyone fell into the place they were supposed to be when they were on a call, I didn't know my position on the team. And I immediately thought to myself, I cannot be the weakest link, I have to learn enough to be a part of this team. So we're, I'm not holding them back. So that you will need to learn. And that drove me to learn as much as I could really, really fast. And that then it was mostly me learning how to be a department. Right? Because you know, in South Florida, you get on here, he does time on the frickin clock. And then the rest of the time you're in the ambulance, and then the ambulances go to fire. So you do get fires. But the majority of my time, when I got on was on the back of that ambulance, and I needed to be good at that job, be the third member on those ambulances. So these guys were passed down some of the best. They were training all the local fire departments and EMS, they were teaching it all on local colleges. The EMT and paramedic programs, have student writers every day in our fire houses. They were winning competitions all over the state and I'm thinking to myself, I need to fall in. So I dove into that. Unlike anything else, the stuff I didn't like to learn in school that I felt like did not apply to my life. That mentality carried over to the fire service. And I began my process of becoming a better paramedic, and a better firefighter because the stuff I was reading made sense to me, it was relatable, and I needed it. And now I always compare it to kids. Or you can tell a five year old kid all you want, when you grow up, you're gonna need to be this way when you marry one day, you need to find a woman that's like this, or like that. Later on in life, you need to make sure you do this. Five year old kids gonna hear that because you're telling him but if he doesn't need it right now, so he's not really going to learn. But if you do that you try run it run icicle This is where you ride a bicycle today. And this is where we get these training wheels off today as five year old kids and and listen to great detail, everything you say and apply it immediately because he needs to now compare myself to that five year old kid learning to ride a bike, I needed to learn how to ride that bike that year. So I dove into everything I can read. And I fell in love with the subject matter. I fell in love with it to the point where I was offered a job teaching it and I started teaching EMT school. And that transitioned with the teaching paramedic school. And between those ACLs class in advanced cardiac life support class here and there. When they would fall on my lap. I started associating myself with people at different universities and colleges that University of Miami that Broward Community College, Miami Dade Community College, and I started getting involved in all these teaching avenues on the EMS side. And people started telling me hey, man, you're a good storyteller like these, you're doing well, your students doing well, passing the graduation ratio is very high. So

I thought to myself, Oh, maybe I'm onto something here. And the students are learning and I'm getting satisfaction out of them being good. And I'm getting better myself, maybe this is something that I need to explore. And eventually, fast forward. You know, Jesus, probably 1012 years of EMS teaching, I ended up in 2009, working at the minimum standards Fire Academy instructor. And it was such an easy transition for me because of my previous teaching experience as an EMS instructor, and then finally understanding the way adults learn and the adult teaching process and the art of adult learning. And well how adults need to find a subject matter that's relatable and applicable to today's needs. And you have to use their previous life experience in EMT score standards, whatever the industry up to that point, or even when you talk to senior firemen, last five years, 10 years, 15 years of experience. All of those things have to come into consideration when you are a new school. They cannot relate to it. They don't need it right away, or they can't doesn't apply to the past previous experience in life. They're not going to stop listening to learning. Okay, so that whole process James really became one of my life's passions. And it carried me through to where we are today. And I don't say that I want to say like you have your question. You know, what took me from being an everyday city of whatever firefighter to where I'm what I'm doing today. It wasn't a cognitive decision. And it wasn't a, a, okay, um, this is where I want to be in five years, I wasn't forecasting, I was just very organic. And a lot of opportunities fell on my lap. But I will tell you is that I never said no to an opportunity, even when I felt like it was too big for me. And then sometimes I learned sometimes it fell on my face, but who struggles we grow, right? And it was in the process of failing that I learned that in the process of passing that I was like, Okay, I belong you. And you do that enough times to this day, I'll do it. Like, if you call me like, Hey, Rob, is to a buck not sure to do a podcast. And I was gonna go, I hope it's a home run, you know, but we're gonna get together, we'll figure it out. I'll never say no to an opportunity to share my passion. Because we're here to get we're scattered more than we got. And I strongly believe that.

J

James Geering 40:45

Absolutely, we're touching on the EMSI. For a second, we joined the fire service where EMS was already very, very entrenched into the fire service. In fact, you have to go to EMT school before you even allowed to walk through the doors of a fire academy. There's still this kind of the word to describe it. But there's this this fallacy. And some firefighters especially some of the younger ones are like, Oh, fuck EMS, I'm here to be a firefighter. When as you've touched on, the number of actual fires that we are able to respond to is diminished year after year after year, certainly in my career. Talk to me about that perspective. For me personally, this, if you do a right hand search in a fire and you find someone you pull them out and you leave them on the on the driveway to die. That's called body removal. But if you have the skills as an EMT, or a paramedic, now you're actually saving a life. So talk to me about that kind of, you know, the the anti EMS conversation, especially with the younger people from you, who has spent a lot of time in Special Operations teachers and National Fire conferences and academies, yet has a very strong EMS background.

U

41:56

So, like you said, I'll just echo what you said in South Florida. For your listeners, South Florida is very has a very strong paramedic culture. We were some of the first in the country, if not the first and sophomore to have paramedics on level one fire department responses. So it's part of our culture down here and very sought very few times will you come across a a South Florida

firefighter, and when I say sophomore, I'm talking about you know, south of Orlando, Orlando, Miami. I'm talking about a sophomore a firefighter that did not start his or her career on an ambulance, or what are brothers affectionately referred to as a bus up north. A lot of the guys put their teeth and sharpen their axes on that ambulance because the ambulance ambulances do make fires, the ambulance has to make fire accidents, Special Operations collapse calls, Special Operations stations have an ambulance assigned to it. Those firefighters that hold special special operations certifications, is just not senior enough to run the heavy rescue on the squads. stations that do hazmat have ambulances attached to them. You have a hazmat engine, a hazmat specialty drug and a hazmat SKU or ambulance component. Those guys would primary duties provide patient care, but they're also at that station because they hold a hazardous materials technician certification. So when they arrive on scene, if there is no patient care to be rendered, they also participate in perform as hazardous materials technicians. Same thing with the structural collapse, guys, once they get there. There's no immediate need for emergency medicine and or transport. Those members are operating at a special operations component, just like you guys, there's loads of unhappy rescued 16. Now for the men and women in our part of the world that only say that they joined the job for the fire component in South Florida in verse seven in South Florida. My travels take me to different parts of the country which are more fire centric, and have not married the two yet, right. But in South Florida, the members that say you know fuck EMS, quote unquote, they're living in a place that really doesn't exist, and they're stuck in their own growth. It is through exposing yourself to those EMS calls to those life or death situations. I was promoted as a lieutenant in my fire department. And my first assignment was as a lieutenant line supervisor on an ambulance. So where I learned to make decisions to deal with conflict resolution deal with complaints, MCs calls on scenes on searches, like you said, left hand right hand oriented. We're gonna get a window wherever we're doing whatever assignment I received from an incident commander, when I showed up on my ambulance, I learned to do that as a loan officer on an ambulance on a fire scene on an ambulance on a serious medical call on an ambulance dealing with an issue with an employee developing growing pains. Be part of their development process all these things I learned on an ambulance until the men and women that had that fuck EMS are put in again, in 80 90% of what we do. So am I saying that one is more important than the other? Absolutely not. We, we get paid. We're paid Fire Department, right? So we get paid to provide extremely, extremely good fire service, and extremely, extremely good medical service. Now, can we control the call types? Absolutely not. But can we control how we respond to these calls and our level of performance? Absolutely, that's within your control, you can choose what cause you go to just like you can choose your experience, or you can control you choose your preparation and your training for those calls. I need a Swiss army knife for lack of better terms I need I need somebody to show up on scene and provide immediate medical care at the highest level, and get them to an opera to get into an operating room or an emergency room, or a cath lab or wherever we're taking them facility just as much as I need that person to do a throw out 24 foot ladder in the right position at the right height at the right window and perform a flawless BS in a room or beyond that door. I need the same members to function at the same level on both calls. Now, is that always a possibility? No, I think I mentioned trouble in the past, I'm going to be completely honest with you, James, it has to be half because what happens in South Florida, as opposed to other parts of the country that do not mix and marry their EMS and fire is that we've been able to open gates and hire people that get on the job that only wants to do EMS. And they just maintain that bear firefighter minimum standard. And then we also have Well, you mentioned guys that Excel and firefighting, but just do the bare minimum standard at EMS, I rely heavily on the rest of the crew to keep up with the latest trends and emergency preparedness. So we have a little bit more to worry about than other places. But if everyone just did their jobs the way they were supposed to, to the scale of their job description, I think we all be okay. But there is really no room for either side of the house, whether it's the

Paramedicine side, or the firefighter side, to say that one is more important than the other, I get it. We're here for them. If you're gonna say that we're here for them, I'm wearing a t shirt that says Send me send me to medical calls, send me to help the old video 3am coquette sent me pull the child out of a fire send me I want to be we have to make ourselves available. Okay, when we raise our hand and take an oath, do you say I do solemnly swear to perform my duties and those duties. And in that solemnly solemnly swear moment, you are creating something that you didn't have to create a promise. If you cannot uphold that promise, both will another job that you don't have to raise a hand and solemnly swear for. There's a lot of those out there. But that's what makes our job different. It doesn't it just works. You're doing yourself in the public a great injustice, if you're swearing an oath, and they're not upholding that oath by being both good at Fire and EMS is better than your job description. I know it's not the same for everybody everywhere. But where I'm from. You have to be good at both. And we have no choice.

J

James Geering 48:20

Well, I'm glad I asked you a question because I agree. I mean, you said your mirror of mine. Well, obviously, you just articulated such in such a great way how I feel as well. There are some departments that obviously is still doing primarily fire, but even London fire brigade and some of these other ones, they're leaning into the EMS side more because there is a cross pollination. And by pigeonholing those two services, you're negating the ability for us to maximize our you know our skill set on scene. So I actually wrote a book about three years ago and one of the chapters is basically about a back to bed call that you know that we will run all the time. But the the incredible impact that simply responding to an elderly couples house and the say the wife has not only fall now bear but she sold herself and the man that could have been a builder or a soldier or a butcher or someone who was able bodied and had a lot of pride and adored in the love of his life now doesn't even have the ability to pick her out of her own shit off the floor. So three men, women, whoever it is respond, and we pick her up, we take her to the you know, cleaner off, get us some new clothes and put her back to bed. To me, that is far more powerful than putting out a mattress fire in a house. So when we have these conversations, we got to remember what was the biggest impact we had on a human being and a lot of times that will be writing a rescue or an ambulance and sometimes it will be writing a truck or an engine.

i

49:47

I refer to this as meeting the needs. We Our job is to meet the needs of society of humanity. They dawn on one for everything. You've all heard that the animals The UFO lands in the middle of the intersection. And they don't want to get into the outer chip. And everything in between our greatest impact. And our ability to improve the human condition is on call to you just perfectly described. Those calls happen a lot more often and more frequently than any mattress fire than any high sentinel event fire. It happens so often I just ran up to half a dozen of those two days ago. And I went to the same lady twice, want to put her from bed to the recliner, and eight hours later from the recliner to bed. And in between she fell by the washing machine, kind of get her husband's daughter laundry off. And she's 96 years old. And they're both crying. And he tells me with a look in his eye that he didn't have to put her in a nursing home. And she says Don't say that. And they've been married 50 years, James 50 years, 50 years, and he's contemplating putting the marriage because you can't take care of her anymore. Okay, if that does not pull at your heartstrings, then you have no heart. And I show

up there with a smile ready to serve. If I bet you complain about it, because I'm exhausted, it happens on the way there. Second, I shut the door that we pull that airbrake and I'll walk in that door with a smile. And I will do everything for that person they did they were my mother, because I told you the beginning how special needs time. My his mother's called 911 a dozen times. And we've had great crews come out and transport Gavin has had a horrible crude commodity credit interest workup. We've had empathetic crews, the men and women that care about their patients, we've had crews, they just want to get them off the stretcher. Okay, they don't know who that who I am. I'm a firefighter, the the firefighter son, it doesn't say that on its shirt. And I treat everybody's kids like they were my own. Because I had that firsthand experience as a father with who needs the fire service, who will be performing at their ultimate, we don't have the opportunity to pick and choose who deserves our service to send me. There's no policy that says this policy covers everything that's not written in this protocol. But there is if meet the needs in a society meet the needs of the call, then that scope of practice, meet the needs of the nature of the poll to the best of your ability, and you're improving the human condition. And that's what we're here for. I solemnly believe that we are here to meet the needs of the people and improve the human condition no matter what it is. Does it get abused? Absolutely. Do people call us for the wrong reasons? Absolutely. And we have people that should not be calling. Absolutely. Yes, yes, yes. And we've woken up 10 times after midnight for bullshit at times. Absolutely. I'm not sitting here saying that. It was all hunky dory perfect. Wearing wavy my Fire Rescue Service pompons. I understand the reality of our job and the difficulties that it creates for a lot of us, okay, but this is what you signed up for. And if not us, then who there is no 912, they dial 911 because they needed us, we're going to meet the needs of the nature of the call to the best of our ability, whether we have a policy for it or not. And they're going to find something we can do to make it go away. Whether it's social services on tax, return to human rights, people, I'm sorry, human rights victims rights advocate, we have all types of services that we provide nowadays in the world that we operate in, that I can refer these people to, that don't need the Fire and Rescue Service, but they're using it constantly. So there are solutions to you give me a problem, I'll find a solution for you. And if I can't find the solution, we're going to invent one together and meet your condition better to sit here and pitch to complain about these calls because it's beneath them and kind of my job description. I didn't sign up for this. I didn't sleep last night because we went up to change this old lady's diaper twice. I'm a firefighter paramedic haven't changed diapers men signed up for this. But you signed up for this. Nobody went out there and recruited you didn't go by Fire Rescue Service and recruitment office on your way to your firehouse you signed up for this. You knew very well we were doing this is not a movie, this is an act draft or ladder 69 or 59 whatever. You know, it would be a really good dogness to make these let people get better and meet them at the best of our ability things. I strongly believe that

 J James Geering 54:20

I watched ladder 69 I don't advise it just so you know. Exactly. It's up there with human centipede.

 54:28

Saturday. That's a good one. Our house plastic game.



 James Geering 54:35

All right. Well, speaking of special needs patients that I had Todd Edwards on here talking about the class that he gives, obviously, he's got an autistic son as well. And that is such an undertrained element of the first responder professional even more scarily, I think on the law enforcement side. Talk to me as a veteran firefighter paramedic now and a father of a special needs child. on some of the things that you wish respondents would know,

 55:04

I am actually excited, I'm going to meet Todd, I believe, next month, at a conference where we are doing our first conference together, we all were on different conferences, we're finding it and doing it together. And I've been a fan of this from afar. And obviously, he did a great job in our career. And if we run in the same circle, which is how to cross paths, and then we share that special needs parenting, understanding that that's very, very, very unique. Man, what do I wish, I wish that there was more exposure to that education. And I gotta be honest, if I didn't have a special needs son, I probably wouldn't want to take the class. It's just not a sexy topic, right? These concepts, thank God, you know, these calls are so few and far between that unless you you're servicing an area that has a special needs facility that you frequent, but these calls are very few and far between because the caretakers, or the parents were very comfortable with everything they threw in the towel daily. So they really do not rely on that one, until they really have to call 911. You know, they're there, they're not going to abuse the system, because they understand the system is not built for a special needs person. It really is. Hospitals are not built for society is not built for special needs people, if you get around in a wheelchair, is almost impossible to get through New York City. Okay, it's a society is not built around that this culture and these people, and neither is our job. In the perfect world. James, I'd love to see more training for our members. Mandatory mandatory training, I love to see whatever it's a continuing education classes are required for paramedic for paramedics, it should be a 100% component that covers every spectrum of autism, special needs, and you know, even assisted respiratory, medical care for kids who have traits and our ventilators. These are part of our society, these members are part of our society and do their cause we respond to that we need to be understanding that they have different needs, and different approaches to assessing them and talking to them, interacting with them, and even handling them. And the parents are also part of the equation. Normally you walk up to a perfect example. And a 41 year old female with a seizure that I might my rescue, my ambulance was out of the firehouse and another medical call. And I ended up becoming a first responder on my ladder truck to the seizure call in my in my zone waiting for Autozone ambulance or rescue to come. So I walked in the door. And there was a special needs 41 year old female who had just had a seizure. And the mother and the father have with them still at 41 years old. And they read when I walk in the door. Being a parent, special needs parent, I can tell by her look that she was a special needs patient and the mother immediate started telling me I don't want her transported. I don't she had the history of seizures. She has a fever. I just called you guys because I got worried. And every time you guys call me, you snatch her and take her off. And I let her finish. And then I said, Ma'am, I'm a Special Needs father as well. My son also has seizures. I understand what you're saying, why did he call us an opinion? And she went on to tell me exactly what she needed me to put in the bag and use decorative temperature. I already called her neurologist and her specialist. And we went down that conversation. Guess what happened when my hand didn't stop there? The Fabulous pulled up, go ahead,

J James Geering 58:35

try to snatch her up.

i 58:37

The second they pulled, they pulled up a wall actually knew it. I left my members inside were hurt. I walked outside and stopped them in the front yard. And I said Hey guys, it's a special needs. 41 year old female, she had a seizure. But yes, a seizure. He wants her check. She does not want her transported. Or she's gonna have to sign a refusal. If she gets out of refusal, if she has special needs. She has thought she had to go to the hospital. Why are we here then. So I had to have a conversation with a lieutenant in the crew outside before they went in that small five minute, this is what we're doing. This is why we're doing it this way and interact with the mother 41 is a violation of her chronological age. Okay, so we're just dealing with chronologically with a 41 year old female, or the mother is making all the decisions for it. This is normal for them. And we went down that road and I gave him a little five minute educational spiel that I've learned only because the trials and tribulations and failures as a special needs father and my interaction with the system but my own guys, my own department was about to walk in that door if I was off duty that day, and do exactly what I would not want them to do for me and my son, because the way I grew we don't have enough training and you just don't know what you don't know. So you know, your level of exposure is associated to your level of success, and they just don't have enough exposure. And these types of calls and I really wish that they would. So it was handled completely well and parents were were thankful and she stayed home and every They worked on hunky dory. But I wonder what if I wasn't there? You know, it would have been a totally different interaction.

J James Geering 1:00:06

We talked about the tricks as well, you just maybe flashback to I think it was, and I'm sure it certainly was. And it came in as a 18 year old male difficulty breathing. And so initially I'd been on long enough to be gone again, this is going to be in a high prevent anxiety. We get there No, it's cystic fibrosis patient, probably close to end of life is the pictures on the, on the walls of the skin of muscular football player, maybe it was a little bit older, maybe it's like 20. But anyway, now he's got probably 60 pounds, he's just skeleton on his bed. But he's got a trach and I forget, there must have been the machine. And in order for us to transport we had to manually Bag him. And it scared the shower me because even though you know, I beg people that were in cardiac arrest, well, that's easy. They're dead at the moment, you know. But now you're you're breathing for this individual. And if you screw up, if you lose the seal, if there's, you know, some sort of mucus plug that you didn't realize that you could, you could kill that person on the way. So that's another area where I felt kind of undertrained. So I mirror exactly what you said.

i 1:01:11

Absolutely. That's why these critical care transport companies nationwide, they, they keep a respiratory therapist with them. So that when they do travel with these patients, they can actually train respiratory therapists with them. And nurses and paramedics for these special care patients hooked up with three guys and girls that may be 21 years old, fresh out of

paramedic school, here you go, kid, this is my son's worst day of his life, make it better. And they're gonna go right off that script on that freakin policy. And if it doesn't make something on there, there's gonna give them high flow diesel and holiday to the hospital, and probably do the best that they can. But again, we are as a fire service and on the paramedic side, and I argue with Todd, you even on the fire side, you know, when it comes to searching for these kids, and what they're most likely going to do, if they find themselves in a fire, like there is no way that they're going to self rescue. You know, that's not an option. And I make a point of talking to my members about that I operate the captain of my firehouse, right. So whenever we run a call be a an alarm, or a medical call, or any type of scene that has either a bedridden person or a special needs person, or infants, I talk to my guys and I remind them and listen to pot on the stove, a business person, something that you you know, pot on the stove, and you guys turn your nose up that like so. So tender water can tap on a pot on the stove will kill this person or this pile because they can self rescue. So do not allow the nose on this call to ever pay your level of preparation. Okay, you show up ready to go each and every time because just like my son Gavin, and my new one Nash. Neither one of them can self rescue men. Neither one of them can for different reasons. So Palm Beach County engine company 58. Okay, if you're listening, guys, you can suck. That's the firehouse serves my area. There's those guys and those men and women on my rescue engine and not suck. They can show up to work and take a day off. Because if I'm not home, and I'm on duty, or teaching or doing something, Gavin and Nash cannot self rescue, and a pot on the stove will kill my kids. So they need to be performing at 110%. When they come out of that firehouse. They have no option. And when my members respond from my firehouse, we have a bunch of Gavin and Nash is in our first deal as well. And I keep the same mindset. That's part of our agreement with the public mine. That is part of our agreement with society. We are part of the community, we are part of the neighborhood. When you get discounts on the firefighter or police officer, when you get discounts as a military member, when people thank you for your service at the grocery store. That doesn't mean you you you serve to protect them, or you ran a call on their family member. That's an understanding that if they need you, you will be there for them. And they're thanking you for your oath, not for you, but they're thanking you and front loading your your service delivery to them. So if you're not going to provide that service and hold up your end of the deal, I'll take the fucking discount. And don't take the gratitude. I strongly believe that

 James Geering 1:04:23

well I love that and also Ocala engine six that accounts for you as well, because that's my first

 1:04:29

account. I've got a lot of good guys to man. Yeah, they do in a great area.

 James Geering 1:04:33

So one more area just said while we're on the lesser tour parts of the fire service. I've had a lot of guests on recently that talks about the human trafficking element. And when I look back now, especially in my time in Orlando in Orange County, I worked in a lot of really shitty areas that are really shitty motels. And now, you know, I kind of kick myself. I mean, I didn't have the knowledge back then. But I look back at some of the calls and some of the roomfuls of women

that I pulled someone out You know, out that was an overdose and you know, we've saved her life. But now, I realized that there was a pimp in there with them, there was three other inner prostitutes. They were being trafficked in some way, shape or form. Another area we don't get any training on at all. Talk to me about that through your eyes if you have any perception.

 1:05:17

I've luckily never even had a human trafficking call in my career. I'm actually wrote it down right now human trafficking question mark. I have not had that experience at all. In my career. I've had prostitution calls, which were probably traffic, but I never even thought about going down that road. But because it didn't meet the Hollywood script of a, a string, import container filled with women, you know, and Leslie Nielsen, trying to save them with this great accent about this another Liam. Liam,

 James Geering 1:05:52

say, let's say yes, and that that's a comedy. Yeah.

 1:05:56

So I, I haven't had that experience of, you know, have several central prostitute calls. But I've never had any type of exposure to that. And since I have it, I'm probably going to not do well. And I do find myself in that position. Until besides everything else we've talked about, in order for me to meet the needs of the community to the highest level possible, I need to also recreate those exposures. And those trainings, not only in advance airway control, special needs patients, interacting with special needs people on fire scenes and medical calls, but also human trafficking awareness, for lack of better terms, is the things that the Forest Service is missing the boat on 100%

 James Geering 1:06:36

Yeah, well, there's a member of deliver fun Cara Smith that I had on I can't remember the number but if people look that up amazing conversation. And she talks about things from you know, more obvious things like, you know, a roomful of several women condom wrappers everywhere, to, you know, matching tattoos, they've all got the same tattoo, which is your branded by the pin, you know, lots of really, they look malnourished, and there's fast food wrappers everywhere, because they've been there for weeks and weeks and weeks. So you know, when you hear the back story, it's not the rape van pulling up and a guy with a ski mask getting out and throwing them in the van. They're being groomed, they're being preyed upon, there's usually people with trauma in their life, maybe they ran away, maybe they're just looking for that, you know, that father figure, whatever it is, and the next thing, they're manipulated to the point where they're selling their their bodies, and these pimps are getting all the money. So we think of trafficking and prostitution is separate, but it's all the same thing. And then you have even trafficking from the manual labor side, there's a lot of you know, that whether it's the people working the fields, some of them are being trafficked to.



1:07:41

Yeah, is that market, it's ridiculous. I have a family members in law enforcement that have told me stories about what they deal with in trafficking side. And like you just said, basically like indentured servants, you know, they face they're doing a, they're paying off their debt of coming into the country or being brought into the country working for free for four or five years in these fields, really laborers jobs. We've had many cases of field workers, undocumented field workers that that call 911 for either chemical exposures or injuries that you would think that they need to go to the hospital for, and they don't speak the language and the person that will speak the language will speak for them. And I've been on scene when I've seen on scene when I've seen right? Where where these members of the fire department are begging these men, these migrant workers to go to the hospital. And they tell you that they cannot go to the hospital that they cannot miss work, and then what they don't want to be sent back to their country. And so it's a it's definitely something that we deal with specially in South Florida, you know, with the population that we have of immigration and the amount of people that we have coming in to so many different avenues and being injected into society. And anytime you have that vulnerable society, a member of society, somebody's going to exploit them, unfortunately,



James Geering 1:09:00

yeah. And it's up to us to be extra pair of eyes. And sadly, you know, earlier in our career, we just weren't given the tools to even see that. So not at all. Well, I know you ended up joining the the Special Operations community within your department, and then you saw Task Force to what I'd love to do, because I know you've expanded on that a lot in other podcasts is just talk about some specific incidents. So you responded to Katrina, I got that right. Yes. Okay. So, you know, what I saw it was it was a very strange time we had 911 this is again through English immigrants eyes, were there 912 came in and you know, everyone banded together and it was seemingly really people trying to make the world better and help New York from outside and the New Yorkers themselves rolling up their sleeves and, you know, joining together. Katrina comes in and similar Anaheim guys were on the UCR Task Force from I forget which number it was, but they went out as well. One of them's almost killed actually, when the rotor wash port picked up a pallet and slammed it into his head. But it seemed like the way the media portrayed that was very divisive and very negative. So the voices from the ground are really our best, you know, way of understanding what actually happened because if you listen to some of the media, the white people went and save all the white people and left the black people on the roofs. So with that being said, Talk to me about that experience through your eyes.



1:10:23

So I'm going to tread carefully on this one, I am a member with a female Task Force, female, Florida Task Force Two out of Miami, Florida, and I've been with them since oh, five. And so boots on the ground. You know, the media is always going to exploit whatever the media exploits, the media needs a story that bleeds, it leads to respiratory needs, you know that they need something to put on the news. And they're going to take any angle possible, especially nowadays, we need information right now, whether it's on Twitter, or on social media, and then we'll find out if it's true or not. But back in oh, five, I believe it was, this was all five media and social media wasn't where it is today. So a lot of the information that was coming in and out of

there was based later. From my point of view, when I was when I when I arrived there, it was no different than any other deployment. And initially, it's a lot of you know, staging and waiting for all that red tape to get cleared. So I do understand what the frustrations are, especially on the female side, back then especially more back then there happened to there seemed to be back then. And I've been in now for about 17 years, almost the beginning there was a lot more female red tape, that we had to be negotiated by my superiors in order for us to get boots on the ground into these major events. And a lot of things, I think they checked a lot of boxes needed to get checked. And before they actually put us in a position where we can start to rescue water needed to be at a certain level. Of course protection, meaning meaning law enforcement or military had to have a good idea of what the situation or the situation was, as far as like the threat level for first responders. All these things need to get checked back then before we commit to any members into an operation. Guys, that men and women think about this FEMA, or this urban search and rescue programs, like something that's been around forever, and really hasn't. FEMA is pretty new, even back when the Oklahoma bombing. Back in the 93 bombing of the World Trade Center of FEMA, the brand new concept in the world of first responders. Okay, this is not something that's been around for 40 5060 years, it hasn't. So in oh five, and the opportunities that it had to employ and deploy, these tactics were still very new. And we're still very governed by by by Ec, for backup, for lack of a better who's in charge of those deployments without breaking it down and making that very important. But we you know, no different James and any other deployment have been on disasters bring out the very best in the very worst in society. You have people that are going to exploit the position they find themselves, then they're going to exploit the position that other people who are caught up into disaster find themselves in to improve their position, or make some type of monetary gain from it. And you're also going to have the heroes, the unsung heroes that go out there. And these disasters bring out the very best in humanity, where they give, they have a bag of ice to split it between three families. And the same on the same block. I have somebody that I'm shooting for a bag of ice, just for themselves. I've seen both ends of it. And I've had a first hand view front row seat to some of the worst disasters, natural disasters and even manmade disasters, unfortunately, and my career, and every single time, I can almost predict the way the script is gonna play out. We arrived, we leave. Let's say that we're there for two weeks. I know what to expect day one, through day three, day three through day 10. And then during the demobilization process, as more infrastructure starts getting rebuilt, and Law and Order starts coming over the land. In the beginning, it's very wild west. And people are going to self rescue. People are going to help each other. But people are also going to exploit each other. Your loot is going to come in and things are going to get sketchy. You're going to say you got to do a lot of good rescue work. So you're going to save the most lives first 4872 hours. So it wasn't Haiti. Actually, it wasn't this last hurricane. We're just out of Fort Myers Beach, Hurricane Ian. We, we saw a lot of devastation in the end, but we've made a lot of good rescues. The first 48 hours we were there. We have had opportunities to do a lot of cool things. And the media sometimes is our best friend to go back to your question. The media sometimes is our best friend. And sometimes we're not we've we've done a pretty good job in forecasts works to RPI O's are excellent. Our public information officers They are excellent. And they maintain a very, very, very strong bond with all the local and national news stations, and they have a very open relationship with them where we understand their needs to get their job done and understand our needs, we also understand each other's boundaries, and they know that Florida task force to get a crew media crew into the area safely, then we will get them in there safely, and what they need to get in and get them out. And we've done this over and over and over, we're very, very active team, we've uploaded every single year somewhere. And I've been tasked with, you know, take CNN around, take Fox around, take the the local news stations around and drive them around for an hour or so I'll get a reporter in the front seat riding shotgun, I'll drive around, and the cameraman and the pack newspaper writers, though the writer on the all day

and they're gonna pause with us. And we all have our role to play because they can market your team and get you the exposure that creates positive feedback and funding. And they can also destroy your team and create the division amongst society, if you do not allow them the access that they need to complete their job. It's a relationship that I encourage, whether on the fire department side and the law enforcement side, or in the urban search and rescue side. It's a relationship that I encourage people to foster and take care of, because I promise you, the media is going to do what the media does, until they know it affects James and they have relationship with games. Until they know that in effect, Rob can have a relationship with Rob, our crews go out on these deployments every year. And our PIOs are in first name basis, texting back and forth with a every major network in the area and in the country. And these guys, and who don't tell stories that get put out. And I'll challenge any of your listeners to go out there just Google South Florida Task Force to disaster and every story you read is going to be a positive one or some positive spin because we partnered to create those relationships. But I encourage everyone in the law enforcement side and freakin FEMA side and their urban search and rescue Fire Department site to create and strengthen these relationships with the news media stations. If you do not have a Pio created position, if you do not have a public information officer assigned to your fire department assigned someone and send them to public information officer school, the 40 hour class, and then they will get guidance and direction of how to interact with them. But we have to use these people to the best of our advantage. And today's world. Media is king. So you need them on your side.

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James Geering 1:17:40

Well, that's interesting. kind of segue. I did an interview with a legendary journalist, Larry Doyle. And Larry was so revered back when journalism truly was, you know, was the new still before they had to make money. And we found ourselves evolving to where we are now. But Larry lived on Sanibel Island. Now just to say so Larry was so revered, that he was the guy that interviewed Nelson Mandela, the day he came out. That's the level of trust that this man had. So I got to interview him, but it was on Sanibel Island. As I leave as Hurricane Ian was bearing down and literally, I drove away. And I think there later that day is when it slammed into the air and Sanibel Island was basically decimated. So talk to me about that response. One of my good friends is actually a firefighter and one of the neighboring departments is to Fort Myers Beach. And he was talking about what he was seeing but again on the news, it almost sound like a get the death tolls and some of these things. Were downplaying and not understanding why. So again, boots on the ground. What was your perception of that? Because obviously, it was very, very near and dear local to us here in Florida.

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1:18:45

Yeah, so thank you for the opportunity. So hurricane in, I have to be honestly I'm gonna give you my my opinion going into it. The deployment was just another hurricane deployment. We're gonna go there. We're going to walk around, we're going to search a couple buildings. We may make a couple of rescues on the front end, but the most of the deployment should be not very events. Just another hurricane to hit Florida. You guys across the country. We don't get excited about hurricane Florida. It's just It's just what we do. Right. It's just part of the background, just like alligators. And so we, we ended up going watching the storm, getting activated the day before the storm, watching the storm, seeing where it was going. We have an excellent planning team are like I said before, our team has been around for a while now and they're very

active. So the governor of Florida and and DC they're both users at a state asset and as a national international asset at times in the Caribbean. So we have our tentacles go into every direction of government, and they keep us very informed. And it was the day before we started noticing that the media was saying the storms heading up north west of Fort Myers to the Tampa Bay area, which is the biggest market up there for news right now. And nothing that we were getting was showing that everything we were getting was showing that it was going south did that too, like you said earlier than Naples Sanibel Fort Myers Beach, Cape Coral area, but the west coast of Florida, the southwest coast of the author. And as the storm grew bigger and bigger and bigger overnight, we started understanding that we were going to get a real big storm that just stalled over the Gulf of Mexico over warm water and was gaining strength. When these storms fall over warm water. They sit there and they build and churn and churn and create all types of water issues with the with the rise and the Create tide issues. And they create a heavy, heavy rain issues. So it's that surge of the storm that creates the first layer of destruction after the break before the wind and the rain. So, man, we started mobilizing everybody we got an 80 member team together, I was one of the managers assigned to the rescue component, which is the technical rescue component of the team, which at the time was probably 46 Members, I believe we had assigned to us, myself and the other Rescue Team Manager. And we deployed that night, like around 7pm. The storm hit at 4pm in the Fort Myers area irritate Fort Myers Beach at around 4pm The day of the storm. And we were out the door by 7pm because we couldn't get in to the area coming from Miami and become part of the problem. So we had to we play our cards perfectly right to as a storm move north at whatever speed the Lord the storm was moving. We were directly behind it with our convoy waiting for the area to clear to to engage. So as soon as the storm cleared, and we were just dealing with like tropical storm winds and that sustain, we were on the ground. The first reports we had games, which got us into the Fort Myers Beach area was of a large building collapse. The team had just come off fresh from the year before from working Surfside, Ponleu collapse. In Miami, we were there for 28 days. So when they said building collapse, naturally, our antennas went up. We just had a recent exposure to that. And we had a seven story building report collapsed on Fort Myers Beach and Fort Myers Beach was in our immediate do so we got permission to do a recall of the area, our bosses and the state level at that point centers. And we split our team half the team went to the Sanibel Marco Island area, that half of the team myself and the rescue guys went to the Fort Myers Beach area, and we got to Fort Myers Beach, somewhere around midnight. I'm sorry, somewhere around 9pm to the bridge across us from the mainland, into over the intercoastal into the Fort Myers Beach islands, our barrier reef, and it took us from 9pm with heavy equipment to clear the roads of boats and yachts and beach sand and powerlines and parts of houses from 9pm. Midnight, to clear the bridge to actually get boots on the ground in Fort Myers Beach. So we can say the people that were affected by the storm were in the storm without first responders or infrastructure from 4pm. To right around 1am when we when we were the first ones on the ground. And he governor put out a tweet around one o'clock that we were on the ground in Fort Myers Beach for the task force to and that we were affecting rescues. That was eerie. It was immediately at that point that I realized that this wasn't a regular hurricane deployment that we were in for one of the worst hurricane deployments since Hurricane Katrina that we have been on as a team. And we've been to Harvey Michael. On Irma. Yeah, I forgot their names. But we've been to a bunch of hurricanes. And immediately I realized that there wasn't to be different. There was no roads left. There was very few structures standing. The ocean sand had taken over consumed the entire Barrier Reef. We cannot drive our trucks through there. We were at a stall. We have to do everything on foot. And if you've ever been in any part of the world where there is no electricity or power for miles and miles and miles and miles. You can see a flashlight from two miles away. And that's all I would see. From a distance. I can just see little flashlights a mile away two miles away, just popping out of debris and rubble and we split a piece as best possible. We started getting a

recon of the area. We weren't familiar with the island. Our cell phone service, our satellite phones were not working at that point. We haven't put up our antennas yet we weren't Are there any RF signals are pumped people are still downrange? You haven't? We are. We're ahead of the team. We're certainly ahead of the line right now, for us to use the firefighters turn, and we're getting as deep as we can. We went over the bridge when right ended up in north, I don't know if North at the time, we went right over the bridge and south of the left of the bridge. And so we call them firstly, and the guy someone right of the bridge came across victims and casualties immediately. And people with every type of agency you can imagine, there's no 911 We don't provide ambulances. We're all paramedics but we have thoughts or medical sides of the team. The teams are built around a great paramilitary instructor. So in order for you to provide medical care in a FEMA Task Force, you have to go through the FEMA medical specialist course. And that becomes your MOS or your job on urban search and rescue. So even though I'm a paramedic in my fire department, when I'm operating at a FEMA Urban Search and Rescue provider, I do not provide medical care, unless it's life threatening immediate to the scope of my ability versus the users all over the country. And we don't cross lines, the only people who can cross lines and provide treatment under the direction of a doctor as a paramedic, and FEMA, as if you take a medical specialist score. So we got our Doc's downrange, they started checking people bandaging people that we could every type of small injury you can imagine that you expect from a storm, nicks and cuts and bruises and hematomas two major common traumatic injuries, both in angulated fractures and paralysis, and we started picking all the low hanging fruit that we can get. And we worked for from that point on, we work 36 hours straight. Without stopping or relief or without infrastructure, the fire department's gone. There were no fire houses left in the Fort Myers Beach area that evacuate with everybody else to the mainland, they were unable to get back in the days after the people that stayed behind. They weren't killed or washed away by the surge. Or they just survive by miracles that stories I heard that survival from that storm in particular, last year were amazing people riding the roofs of their house in 40 foot waves floating on roofs of the house with their with their wife and kids wanting to get tangled up with the mangroves and right out of frickin 100 Monarch windstorm. And they said it was just lightning and waterspouts and pitchblack ways knocking them around on the roof of their house. All night long, the storm flew over. And the water receded. Casualties like on I mean, like no other storm we've seen before. We were finding, you know,



1:27:25

not lot of loss of life. Our team was finding a lot of loss of life everywhere we went.



1:27:32

People were coming up to us telling them what they were telling us where the bodies were right when we got there. You know, my neighbors did my neighbor, tiny honest window, my neighbor's dead in his attic. Perhaps somebody stuck in my roof. We go we check on it. And we move on to black tags. You know, and that's hard to do in the beginning. You know, because we want to help just like everybody else doesn't need help they've been waiting for since see someone in uniform since a storm happened to help them. And here we are telling them that we have to keep moving in now because we're trying to get a picture of a man trying to get a 500 foot picture of what we're looking at. So we can start dividing our labor and our resources in the most effective way possible. And know who to call in. The storm ended up paying so

much of the coast that we were alone for a couple of days, our task force in the area, because the system vessel depleted immediately that they needed help all the way from Marco Island, North Tampa. And the storm had caused so much destruction. And so many of the teams that were in the Orlando area of staging could not get over because of storm started, it sat over them for a while, and they couldn't travel on palm oil. And so they got stuck where they were in staging. We came from the south, but we ended up working on the beach, which is about a six and a half mile, give or take I may be wrong and maybe seven, six and a half mile barrier reef for the first couple of days by ourselves. So we had seven miles of destruction, six and a half miles of destruction for one task force until eventually, you know, day 567. We got the FEMA help needed the team to continue the operation but we work. You know with those ad guys, we've worked around the clock 24 hours a day within the rules of engagement or the area within the rules of engagement of FEMA, within the rules of engagement of the state, within within the rules of engagement of the local authority having jurisdiction to affect as many evacuations rescues and address as many human needs as possible. Without infrastructure. It was a it was a lot of work. And I'm very very very proud of the team on deployment. We hadn't never as a team evacuated an entire island. When you set up pick up rally points when evacuated. high rise buildings that must have been 25 buildings over 20 stories that we evacuated on our own squads of eight guys and put about their chairs are 20 stories with a guys that's an eight hour day when their legs were hurting I watch that they make a t shirt of it and they call for the quad squad. All they did was the stairs for two days straight rescue hardcore rescues, water rescues all types of work that I'm very proud of what a deployment James so many things and so many lessons learned.

J

James Geering 1:30:21

Well firstly I'm so glad I asked you because like I said my one friend because I was based on what we're seeing on the news. I was thinking as we all do in Florida, Oh, it's another hurricane you know? And then you think about that area is a very wealthy area. So I'm like, Okay, well, this would be well built houses, everyone would be fine. But then you know, my friend told me Well look, we've got like everywhere else we have got some poor areas and places where they just never sold their land to make a big fancy house and there are trailer parks and these kind of things. So then it changed the shift. And then you're seeing the footage coming in I think it was Fort Myers Beach have their stations flooded like you know, almost like nipple height, the rates and obviously out of service challenges pull some of the gear off. And that put in perspective will shit that's what the fire station looks like, what does the rest of the the place look like? And then I speak to Larry and his house is completely destroyed. And he had a house on stilts. The first first floor was it was the parking garage. So but I still feel like it was downplayed to so many people. So it's so important that we hear from people like yourself that can paint this picture not only of all the great things that you and your team did, but also what the residents suffered and the actual death toll that happened here.

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1:31:31

Yeah, it was a you know, it is when you're on these types of incidents, you're so insulated from society. We can't talk to our families because the phone's not working your working hours feel like minutes and and basically like hours. And anybody has been on any type of deployment knows that whether it's military or fire don't know what's happening in the news. You don't know what's being shared his death, the common theme, or you know, people would send me a

message I got see you guys in the news, when we get to service and scenario the island. And I'm like, I have no idea what they're talking about. And what the news is saying. There's no people in there at the time to the news critically themselves. But we we really, really, really were stretched to our limit. And the average that you tell your friends house on stilts, there was no rhyme or reason as to what's good and what felt. I went up to these like I said 20 storey hotels on the ocean, 20 storey hotels, concrete block and rebar fireproof buildings, okay. And the first floor balcony gone. Second floor balcony on the ocean side gone. The sand underneath the 20 storey building 10 feet of in our gun, it's just pillars of foundation into the earth exposed in the third floor balcony where the water stopped, had exposed rebar sticking out of the bottom of the balcony, did the the ocean came in three storeys high and wiped out everything that it could. And the power of that water pushing through that entire Barrier Reef was unseen. And the history of Florida had never, never happened. Never once. And like you said, we think about these places as places where rich totally live. Not at all. Fort Myers Beach, I found out while I was there, that was one of the few places left where you could live. And there wasn't a Hilton, there wasn't a a Marriott wasn't any of that none of those hotel companies are moved in yet. Everything with Mom and Pop, all the restaurants, everything. There's no big box stores, no food chains, and it was inheritance. And so the people that live there were generations eat and all those homes are gone. And I can't imagine any of the rebuilding. You're going to see now I predict other big chain hotels and are going to be the only one to afford getting back in there after the storm, but tremendous amount of damage bodies. And you know we have said about they set up a morgue, for lack of better terms disaster management teams did, they came down and instead of a portable or mobile morgue, and through the Lee County Sheriff's Office, they operated in conjunction with our team to identify and get the bodies to the next again. Our members performed flawlessly. And it was around week by the end of week one I want to say and I could be off of the timeline. So if anybody's listening that was there with me, I apologize as a fog. And I don't have no sweat right now. We weren't planning on talking about this. But somewhere around the end of week one started getting help from the FEMA for passports and so the FDNY guys got there from north from New York. A couple guys out there from camp to Ohio, Pennsylvania, and all the usual guys that we deploy with and work with us on FEMA deployments made it into town and they they join the fight and hung out and and help us to our second variant third circuit of the area. And until we cleared every single building, every single rubble pile, I'm talking about the layers of search that we did there are unprecedented in Florida, we hadn't ever done that we actually did seven miles. At the end, we were done searching every structure at the end of two weeks, for three times in every crawlspace, in every basement, in every attic, on boats on foot in the ocean, on every way you can search a building, we ran live and cadaver dogs for seven miles for two days straight through every row, pilot every structure. And if they stopped and got a hit, we committed a team to it down to the ground, to make sure there was nothing in there. And it was no leave no one behind. And leave no remains behind. Thankfully, we've been gone for quite a time now. And they've never found anyone else has to be left. So I'm very proud of our members.

J

James Geering 1:35:53

Well, I mean, again, this is incredible. And thank you for telling the story. I didn't I don't plan any of these conversations. But I mean, this is something that you know, hasn't really been discussed apart from two people off, Mike, you touched on another incident, I want to hit this and then we'll get out of this whole you know, this disaster topic but you said about natural and manmade I'm assuming that was the surf Cyclops a lot of my friends especially in the mental health side responded down there to be support Dustin Hawkins and ball and some of these

other guys. Talk to me about that event, because you have this hurricane, we know it's coming, you know, we're bracing for it. Now you have a condo complex that was poorly maintained that how to leak. And unbeknownst to anyone, all of a sudden the whole thing fails.



1:36:36

So okay, so June 24. From the building fell, I was I just I'll fly to Cody Moore and Oklahoma City to do a speaking gig at one of his conference for two firefighters that had been killed in the line of duty. And so I landed on my connecting flight in Atlanta from Fort Lauderdale. And my phone is going crazy. And I'm like what's happening? And as the building collapse, building collapse, building collapses, like 7am in the morning. Am I connecting flight? So I started putting on the news and I see what happened. I made a couple of calls home they're like, Yeah, we don't know yet. It's in Miami Dade County Fire Rescue jurisdiction. They're gonna they're gonna have the resources. We don't know how big the building is. There's no one had a picture in their mind yet of the scope. How bad it was. We figured you know, Miami Dade County be paying 70 per firehouses. And being one of the major players in the entire eastern seaboard or the United States, we thought and this morning that they're gonna handle it. So I continued my way up to Oklahoma City. And it was while I was up there that the team was deployed, so I was very late to the party. But the team was there for 28 days total. It was when I made it to Surfside, it was different from other deployments, because we're in our backyard. A lot of the guys that have made it from there, I myself live 30 minutes from there. So we normally don't deploy that close to home. And not because we knew anyone there just because an installation that we benefit from when we're gone on deployment, we didn't have it. And it was very smart on the team leaders to keep our members on site. It wasn't a popular decision. But a lot of our team was kept insulated on site for that reason. And they deployed to some of them minutes from their home and stayed there for the duration of the deployment. During the search, or I will say that it was different is the fact that there came a point during the operation, where it was understood that it was very improbable that weeks into a collapse, you're going to be finding anyone alive. So it became a search and recovery mission. And our mindset is not that of search and recovery, where in fact when it turns into a recovery operation, funding ceases, ceases on the staffs on the female side, and on the state side, and our urban search and rescue teams get sent home. Right. And so this time, no, that was sent home because it was in our backyard. And we had made a commitment to the victim's families and everyone else in the area, whether it was a formal commitment or not. It was understood agreement that we were going to keep digging as a team until everybody in that building that was known to be missing 100 plus would be found and identified. So that's what they did when they were there. Were there over for a month, almost over. And that tempo of operation as a leader was very difficult for our leadership because, like I said, our mindset is that of search and rescue. You talk to a scene that needs to be searched, and your level of operational tempo is at a certain height. And anybody that shows up to a hot scene, whether it's in the law enforcement or the fire side understands what I mean by your operational tempo being very high, your level of situational awareness and, and, and productivity and your the time you work rest cycles are very short, because you need to stay on task as much as possible to the greatest amount of good for the most amount of people or to achieve the mission that you're on. Well, when you change the mission on these dogs, and they're just search and rescue dogs, and estrogen recovery dogs, they gotta keep searching and recovery, like their search and rescue. So bringing that mindset down, and to become more meticulous, more detailed, and decide, we're going to make sure that we do this in a way that no one gets hurt. And we're going to be effective and efficient and thorough, and we're going to work the best of our ability to make sure everyone here gets a respectful sent home. What if that was the biggest challenge, not so much the physical

challenge, the mental and emotional component that came with that was different than any of the women that we've ever been on, because we're just not built for that we're struggling search and rescue team are not being built for that. I spoke to guys from New Jersey that were there from Pennsylvania that were there is remote Orlando that were their task force four guys from Task Force six, and those codes. And, you know, the sentence was pretty much the same. Everybody was glad they were there. But they were having a like a, it was a challenge to flip that switch to I don't need to work myself down to up in the next eight hours, because they need me for 28 more days, you know, and normally, we're not on the plane for 20 more days, because we're at the rescue team. Slightly. You mentioned mental health, because I'm, oh, the peer support, I'm not a peer support anymore. I did a bunch of mental health things when I was a training officer for my fire department. I'm back between 13 and 18. And I still have a lot of friends in the in the Mental Health Coalition in South Florida. So during the deployment, there was an issue with the construction workers. There was people and heavy machinery on these buckets and movers that were helping us directly the layer of pile one section at a time. So the pile is broken down into different grids. And the grid are broken down into smaller grids, smaller boxes, if you can picture like a tic tac toe, that never ends, drawing. And so these guys had the same drawings, we'd have the word speaking the same language, and there and they were sitting there with their buckets, and very gently and surgically removing one inch at a time with these giant mega ton hydraulic pockets that can move Earth at an amazingly freakin pace. They were using them so gentle, where you can move an inch at a time, of course, these guys are great at what they do. And we we look at them and to give them a sign and they move away and move later. But what happened is that you find a body, they also had a front row seat of that from their bucket. And they sit there for the entire removal process identification, process bagging process of picking up process. And that became a very ridiculous thing up after that didn't do the bucket anymore. So you're in the barn, each job was done by hand to get the bodies out. So where does the mental health component come in? I'm there while I'm there one day, and someone came up to me says, Hey, robins Spanish. I said I do. I go Hi, I'm so and so from the coalition. Um, I need you to go with us at noon, behind this building here. And we're doing an all star on the pile. And every single construction worker is going to be back there and half of them don't speak English. And we need to talk to them about mental health, what they're seeing what they're doing, because the guys are having a hard time. This is about a week into it. And they've been seeing these guys, they're not signed up for this. That's not their job. They move things they don't move people. And especially people who've been buried in debris for that long. It's very impressive. Someone that's never seen it, that it also I mean for someone that seen it all the time, let them for someone who's never seen it. So we went back there and and they had we had an open basically debrief. And we went around the room and closed over 4040 construction workers there and they all talk in Spanish and English and their bosses talk and operators talk and Foreman top and and they all did it out and there was a lot of crying and hugging. And we tried to normalize it as best we could we told them what to look for with respect, what's normal, what's not normal, what they expect what we expected from them. We that that we were approachable, that they did that for them not to think that they had to work through something that they didn't understand without talking to us. And we tried to normalize an abnormal situation for them as best as we could in English and Spanish to civilians. Now first responders to come keep them on mission, because we needed them and those machines for what ended up being another three weeks. That was a, I was a challenge. And I walked out of there, you know, feeling like, I hope this works. And I'm glad I did it because I needed it as low, I needed it as well. And I got an opportunity to speak to them from a rescuer point of view, who speaks their language, who has a lot of similarities to them and their families, and tell them that I was uncomfortable with it, I was gonna have a hard time dealing with it. And this is how I was going to approach it. And I encouraged them to do the same. And this was normal, because this is abdomen, so that where we're feeling abnormal is

absolutely acceptable or normal at that moment. But we're in the middle of a fight. It's round, 612 round fight. So I can't have them check out on me. And also, it wasn't a total debrief, it was a debrief, but keep fighting debrief was like a in between round coaching session, you know, Bob, and you're walking into his left look, you know, but so we it was that kind of conversation that I was a part of, wasn't part of any of the major debrief at the end. And actually, I heard through the grapevine that one of the members of the construction company that we're working very closely, ended up passing away from self inflicted wounds later in the year.

 James Geering 1:46:19

Well, speaking of that, I mean, you've led us through so many of these, you know, career calls, we haven't talked about Haiti or some of the other ones that you responded to as well. But so many of us accumulate this, this, you know, McCobb, Encyclopedia of stories and images and losses, some of us that, I think in my opinion, we're fortunate enough to have things that happen early life that set us up for success later and have a slightly stronger foundation. Some of us have a very rocky foundation before we put the uniform on, based on our journey through and you're smiling. So that might be you to talk to me about that. I mean, how you know, what, what are your highs and your lows, when it comes to the mental health side with the high up tempo your career has had so far.

 1:47:03

It's part of the process, it's just a, I am not a mental health expert. So bear with me. There's a lot of guys and girls that do a great job, putting yourself in that arena. I'm not the poster child for their mental health. I've messed up, I've been very fortunate, I've never had any addiction issue. And I've never been down the road where I've thought, you know, man, I need help. Right now, although I do get help all the time. I have a therapist, and I'm very proud of that. I think anybody who is a thinker, and then considers themselves an intellectual should have a therapist, that somebody needs to listen to your thoughts other than yourself. And then they need to normalize your feelings for you. I shouldn't be answering my own questions all the time. So myself and my therapist, Jeffrey, he has a home run, I've been with him for a couple years. And, and him and I are we make things happen we we go many layers deep. And every once in a while he'll, he'll plant a little seed in my head that last three days later, and we'll have a good conversation about it. But he and I are talking about all these things, because I believe that when I got on the job, like everyone else, I had no idea other than I was gonna go do a bunch of cool shit, that any of this was going to build up or affect me at any point that it was in other news, friends over it, that PTS or PTSD or mental health issues, were going to be part of my career process, that I was going to make relationships with people that were no longer going to retire with me and go to their funerals because they just couldn't deal with it, deal with it adequately. I felt impervious to all that just like every young guy does, that and we got on, I'm hoping that now with the exposure and awareness, and it's being put out in fire academies and, and the movement to like, allow these members to talk about it, when they get on and deal with it appropriately throughout their career, you know, you've you've spread out every day, you know, chances are, you're probably not going to have some type of catastrophic explosion of your of your past, when you go for a run, you know, but if you never stretch out, there's a probability not a possibility that you're gonna get hurt. These things are stretching more than we do, stretching their brain more than we did. We were just part of that society where it just wasn't what was something that we either admitted to affecting us or just recall,

we're not talking about it. I have a lot of friends, though. Close, close friends, that are, you know, recovering from addictions, in a way have been, you know, we call it the firefighter sleepover camp. And they went away and, and for rehab, or they went away for the mental health treatment, and they came back and they're, they're advocates of it, and they talk about it openly. anybody that will listen, you know, God bless them, and they have to live through them as as a supporter of their processes. I've had, like I said earlier friends that that ended their lives, whose career paths are very similar to mine and that's probably what first hit me James that shit. This can happen to me too. Because being in the beginning, just a young dude happy to go to Oh shit, and come back with some gnarly war stories. I wasn't aware of how it can affect me. And then it got to a point where I'm like, Listen, man, I'm teaching everywhere I went to the home, run his stuff, go for the chip. No one's built for this shit. No one is built for this shit. And I saw one of my really good mentors and people I looked up to, and friends, you know, and his own life. And he was somebody that I was aiming to be like, and emulate, and model my behaviors. After because he was so successful, everything he did. And at his funeral, I had that moment where I thought to myself, this could be my funeral. If it happened to him, it could happen to me. He had everything going for him, he was so full of life, Parts Guide, every room teaching at every freaking conference. And here I am, you know, at his funeral. That was the first time that I had that oh, shit moment, this could happen to me. A little things in between deployments in Haiti and stuff like that, when it builds up is when you come for me, I'm not speaking in general, when it builds up for me is when, if my personal life is not 100%, and then I go through this professionally, I have a harder time dealing with it. So like during my first marriage, and my child and, and Haiti and stuff like that, those deployments, where you really, really get tested. And you really bring those precarious positions where you're like, hey, I can at any point during this operation, or you have a couple of near misses and, and you come home and hits you a couple of days later, and it's no longer cool, because now your life at home is not where it's supposed to be. And those little things start building up, it's almost like death by like 1000 robots. Now one big freakin knife to the to the heart. It's just 1000 little cars, and eventually, you bleed out. And that's what happened to me that the accumulation of that made me seek therapy, and surround myself with people that was okay to talk about those vulnerabilities. People relate more to your vulnerabilities, and they do to your successes. And I strongly believe that as well. So I'm very open when it comes to talking about my challenges. And I surround myself, you know, to my core group of friends, and like, holy crap, what is the circus like, these guys are all former recovering this out of the others or, or they've been away to this day, they teach mental health that these are the people that I'm okay with being vulnerable, because they keep it real. And they've been there. And I can't have I can't get myself to talk about the way that I feel are the issues I'm having are sessions with my therapist with people that don't admit to those vulnerabilities. And I feel like I'm being judged or like, I'm not enough. And that might be in my own head. But I don't want to give my energy and my vulnerabilities to people that approach the fire service like that. Because it's changed, it really has changed. And I can say, between all the regular career calls, just fire department 911 calls, the deployment Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and Coral Springs, just so many things that, that we get to be a part of that never go away. And it took me a while to normalize those emotions and those questions, and those intrusive thoughts throughout my life, smell that reminds me of this. Okay, Rob, that's normal. Your your brain is playing the matching game, constantly doing that. But brain to do that. And the second day, I will tell myself, it was normal. And I normalized the thought. The thought no longer bothered me. And it was a naggy and I was trying to figure it out. It was a lot of self healing, through understanding that I'm not made of stone understanding that these things actually and speaking to my therapist, and making myself vulnerable to the members that I work with, that helped me work through this process as a man and as a fireman. Because before I put on the firefighter outfit before I do anything, I'm

just a dude, just like everybody else, and we're all human. And we're all people. And then if you're not, if you're not a people person, you're in the wrong business. We're in the business of you know?

J

James Geering 1:54:15

Absolutely. Well, again, thank you for that vulnerability. This is what people need to hear they know you was you know, the founder of national rescue rescue consultants, and we'll get to in a second, they know you, you know, is this task force to member and all this stuff, but we are just people in a uniform, you know, whether you remember the essay s or Delta Force or, you know, you saw attack or whatever it is. We all went to school. We know we all started off running around the playground is just we're not, you know, forged like a Spartan from birth to prepare you for this journey. The mentor that you lost, was that Matt negly that you're talking about? Yeah, so that sent a ripple through the fire service, obviously, especially locally here when I was Orange County when when he died in Orlando. You touched on Parkland this one, I hit that very quickly. And then we'll go to the training that you offer. I had, Tony and Tory Gonzalez on the show had a couple of the guys from Coral Springs as well. We just had even more horrendous shootings, we had the anniversary of the valid issue in the other day. And what breaks my heart is, it'll be a shiny object in the media for a couple of days, people will try and kill each other over weapons ownership, and then they'll forget about the kids and the families and just move on and the responders. So if you you know, we'd like to, I'd love to just hear again, that event through your eyes, because I don't think we can hear the stories enough to remind us that we have to address the multifaceted approach. That is the violence not only in our schools, but outside our schools as well.

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1:55:44

So just a brief before we even get into it a Tony Gonzales, I'm sorry. Anthony Gonzalez. Yeah, Tony Gonzalez, Gonzo, actually referred to by all of us, he's a task force to guy one of the best guys stand up gentlemen, and be great to keep off with Veritas that made and bless him and his daughter as well for what they went through. And him being that day on that scene where I had a couple of conversations with them on scene leading up to stohlman, which is funny, and I just, I'm just a guy that showed up to the call with a bunch of other guys to try to do our best. But I'll give you my POV for that call. Basically 2013 I think I mentioned earlier to 2018 I was running a training division for my fire department. During that time, I sat on a committee of a unified committee for the county I work in in Broward to come up with a what we referred to as an active shooter policy. We didn't have a unified active shooter policy. And we knew that as a county, we needed one of this kind of event would require a county response, no in most city, and the county was going to going to be able to handle that significant event on their own. And so somewhere around 2013, we started training for it. I took an interest in it. And at the time, I was, like I said, running training for my fire department. I became really good friends with Jason Pellegrino who the lieutenant for the fire for the police department in my city. And he was in charge of training for them. And we started working together. And he's a he was another high speed guy that love training. So we hit it off right away. We do lunch together for our schedule, and talk about police and fire training all the time. And he was very elusive in its training. And he's like, Yeah, dude, let's get our guys together and come up with something to make it happen and took them to a bunch of meetings. He loved the meeting. And we ended up playing law together and and have cordial relationship where over the next from May 13 2018 When

the shooting happened, him and I were just like training our entire Fire Department. We were taking over schools during spring break elementary schools and running you know, 50 coffee or 50 firefighters and we got funding for people that are off duty. With the hospitals involved or dispatchers It was great. We're hitting homeruns at every level for things that I thought we would never ever do ever. Because this is not Columbine, this not Aurora is not at please, it's still gonna happen where I work, partly Lake Park. And that's one of the nicest communities in Broward County. You know, Parkland has more hockey players and NFL players per capita. I think that anybody in the in Broward County as far as residents. So leading up to it, I gotta tell you, I first thought that it was never going to happen. And but I valued it tremendously. And I'm very proud of being part of the of the wave that was coming through Broward County at a time so that we can come up with a policy to respond to this event. The day of the event, I had returned to shift from 40 hour after being gone for five years. We're in polyester and an office job at the training center. in Coral Springs, actually, I ended up being reassigned to a truck on my firehouse. And in January, January 13 was my first shift back our truck. And February 14 was Marjory Stoneman Douglas, I don't even back on the road for like maybe four or five shifts when that happened, so we were grabbing dinner at a local grocery store. I just got him back in the truck. And my driver turns to me and says, Hey, did you hear that? I said what he goes, though that shooting. There's a shooting right now going on. At Marjory Stoneman Douglas eagles. What's the world coming to you believe that there's a kid in that school fighting and shooting each other right now? That's such a nice school. And I thought to myself, most of the world coming to men, kids aren't safe anywhere or the father. Like you put them in this nice school in this nice neighborhoods. Here. They are fighting and shooting each other. And they guys probably overgrown. So We drove away. As we drive away, I'm gonna sing to their tactical channel. They're heading back to the firehouse. And I hear dispatch come in and say there's more shooting more shooting. First thing is on scene, police officer saying they're shooting, there's, I can hear gunshots in the background. There's somebody in the school, somebody shooting with a rifle. And it got real real fast. And it was a gang fight. And from a gang fighter turn into oh my god, this is an active. This is an active killer. This is really happening. This is real world. But there's no way we're gonna get there. And it's probably not what it is. You know, we think it's not going to be that. Anything but that. And so, I pulled into the firehouse made it to read about to the firehouse, they room with other groceries for dinner. But 10 bags in each hand because Daddy didn't raise no quitter ain't doing two trips. And I'm about to drop the eggs off in the kitchen table. And these guys are asking for help and dispatching units, and I self dispatch. I got in the truck and started driving over there. I told her cheaper we were going at the time our chief was very okay with it. And we deployed over there. I went in route somewhere when I got airtime was somewhere when I was about five minutes off when I finally was able to get on there. I didn't want to interrupt their communications. And I just got an I got a location for the the casualty collection point which was a cross street of Holmberg and Pine Island. And I told the driver Hey, know what that is. You said yeah. Can you drive any faster. And he tells me he tells me I'm out of my seat, I can see him, but out of his seat, pedal to the metal, and the trucks got a governor. So we're doing 65 No matter what. And he goes, this is the fastest I can go. And we ended up pulling up pea sauce wedges in pulling around a bunch of parents that were there to pick up their kids chaotic. Up to where I see a lot of fire rescue guys and trust. I just corner this intersection. And I pulled his ladder. I'm the only suppression unit. there that should have been a clue. I had no business being there. So as soon as I get off, I met by the Coral Springs EMS chief who said, Chief What do you need? And I can see there's kids being treated. And kids coming and golf carts with gunshot wounds and schools evacuating and the parents were running in. And he says first thing I need is to get that effing firetruck out of the CCP. This is where we're rescued or the ambulances have come here to take patients to the hospital. So I turned to my driver. I said, Hey, Steve, take the truck out here. He said, What do you want, I don't care if he's not here. And that's the last time I saw him for eight hours. And I

saw him again after that. For eight hours. We started working in the casualty collection point. Treating kids getting them on rescues. Immediately the first wave of rescues transported I want to say maybe the first 10 Kids calm alerts gone. So immediately absorbed the first 10 to 14 rescues that were there. They were gone. And so we're waiting for additional rescues to come in. The guys in Coral Springs had worked with me in training. And they knew that we were all part of the same coalition when it came to rescue task forces and the treatment of patients inside and tourniquets and chest seals and all that and ended up getting assigned by one of the members operate running operation for them. The rescue Task Force One RTF one was given to me and they told me rob your RTF one, go find a bunch of guys and meet by the middle, which is this vehicle with slot guys. They're going to bring us in. And so I went around and James when I looked around to create a rescue Task Force, my crew was gone, getting patients somewhere and just couldn't get back. And all the ambulances were gone. And there was nothing left a bunch of fire trucks with a bunch of salty old firemen that went to training and said we're never going to do this shit. This is for the ambulance guys. And that became my first rescue Task Force. And I walked up to them and I said hey, I need you guys to grab chest seals, tourniquets, everything you have idea we're gonna we're creating a seven member RTF they're asking seven members right now. And they're like, Oh, what do I get that from? What do I do this boss? Where were their buddy else when they were all going out? So we ended up getting a bunch of guys in there. They were gung ho dumped right in. It was a it was a home run. Now I know that you had chief babbling on and I'm gonna throw that man all the kudos in the world. He's the city manager now. He talked about leadership on their fire. They literally under fire. Hindsight is 2020 So now with all the other reports and everything that came out, we know that we were there. He was gone the shooter when we Were there the shooter was gone. Real soon after we arrived, it was killed to kill Don. And we were getting delayed information from the talk. In fact, a lot of Tactical Operations Center, from the light from the cameras that we believe are they believe to be real time information, right, according to the reports that came on afterwards, and it was on a delay. So we thought the killer was still moving through the building. We were also providing medical care to these kids. Chief Babic I still call them chief fabric as the city manager was out there, and he and his training chiefs. Rama Galloway turned to me one point McGill away, they're not cheap family. He was busy doing cheap



2:05:44

things. And my training buddy around McGinn away, turned to me and said, Hey, grab everything you can grab. You're gonna go with me to go pick a kid up that's outside needs to be pulled out. said Alright, cool. I grabbed the backboard and a bunch of stuff that I can grab tourniquets, chest seals and all that I get my RTF position with another member. And I jumped into the back of his suburban back cargo area, to the backboard index where everything in there jumped ended the day she wrote in the front, right. She from a getaway drove. We got into Suburban, we drove past officers that were, you know, taking positions and security over medians against traffic into the school parking lot. up to the front foyer area, which point we got communications that there was the tutor within the second floor, or third floor, I may be wrong what floor was on attempting to shoot out windows to shoot out the windows. And for everybody to see each seat covered up first responders our police and fire see cover see covered and we stopped the vehicle. I had a conversation in front back then in here. And they got out. And this is the funny part of the story, which is a very somber occasion, right? They both get out and they hide on the passenger side behind the engine block on the ground. And I'm still in the back and I can't open patch from the inside. And I'm knocking on the glass because you forgot something right? And then they open back for me and then now anyways, during this time some stories are not other people heard actually might be the first person I

ever say story to on a podcast. And I'll say it very proudly. I remember like it was yesterday. cheap fabric was given a bulletproof vest by by one of his police officers. In I can picture the police officer putting on him as he's talking. If they were being dressed by the police officer. He's on the radio giving orders and commands. He was wearing a vest and said police in the back. And he was the only one wearing a vest none of us had passed at this time, our helmets. They weren't issued for either Fire Department. And it was at this time that he removed his vest and threw it back in the vehicle and laid on the ground seeking cover behind an engine block. Open Skies that also did not have vents. And when asked why did he wear his best, he always said that he was not going to be wearing a vest if his members did not have that. His instinct for self preservation was trumped by his instinct for leadership. At that moment, literally under fire. And I had that ocean moment. This guy's a real deal. Today we're in trouble and he just took off his vest. And because none of us have. And we were there for a while. Situation calm down. So a lot of bad things. And I ended up staying there till past NPM. This happened early in the afternoon right before school let out somewhere between two and 3pm. And we didn't get back to the firehouse too close to midnight, after the debrief. After we had all the special teams come in and talk to all of you to respond in a transporters to a to a performing arts center where they can fit all 80 or 100 of us in that room. Got those guys still have blood on their shirts and their pants and and our medical director was there and he had blood on his button down shirts and sleeves rolled up. And we spoke to everybody and went back to the firehouse thank you so insulated, not a phone call, not a text. None of that ever happened, right? Because minutes go by like seconds while you're on the scene. And you don't know what's happening the outside world. And I remember clears day walking back into my firehouse and the first thing when I walked into the firehouse to my left is the day room. And Donald Trump is on TV, talking about Marjory Stoneman Douglas. And that was the first time in my career where I see the President of the United States talking about a call that I just cleared. And it was a it was like that, oh shit, this is big moment. You know, between what I just said, and when I got there to where it ended There's so many interactions that happen. And so many unfortunate things that we dealt with, and so many heroic moments, so many leadership moments, and so many frustrations that I can hear and do another two hour podcast on that, out of respect to everybody that passed and the people that serve, I'll keep those memories for myself.

J James Geering 2:10:20

You mentioned Fran barber neck, I interviewed him with Chris beta. And it's funny actually, we did an entire conversation, I went to another interview a little bit later, they borrowed my memory card, and ended up accidentally wiping the interview. My file, I should have downloaded it prior to that. But anyway, lesson learned. So we ended up doing it twice. It was it was beautiful. And I got to talk to these guys again, the presentation that they put on which I watched in I think it was Orlando fire conference or one of the one of the local ones in Central Florida is incredible matching the you know all the radio traffic with the the dispatches information with the video cameras, and then some kind of animated maps. If anyone hasn't seen that, and I tried to get them on, we've tried to do kind of was like a virtual presentation that we could share to everyone, but I got to stick around with them again. But that is such a powerful witness. That was one single score. As you mentioned, I've had people on here that were at Aurora that were at Columbine that were at multiple for the pole shooting that we haven't all shooting Yeah, yeah. And so the problem is it kind of gets swept under the rug. People argue about guns, they stop. And then they talk about you know, like most recently well as a trainee, oh my god like and that becomes more fucking important than a school full of kids that were just murdered. So it's so important that we hear these. So I just just want to say for

that one thing that you talked about, thank you, because that keeps the memory of those children alive. And it keeps the mission that we have to fucking address, not just guns, mental health, psychiatric meds, violence on our screens, sleep deprivation, you know, bullying all these other compounding elements that have created this cycle of violence that really doesn't exist how the anywhere else on the planet except the quote, unquote, greatest country in the world.



2:12:06

Absolutely, man. And if you guys listening think that this is never going to happen to you. We're going to small fire department. It's never happened in your town. I was you. I was you. And shit that never happens happens all the time. So please, like prepare for it. Because it gets real very fast. Very fast.



James Geering 2:12:26

Well, speaking of preparation, you know, you've you had such a storied career up to this point, you became a student, you became a mentor on your own department, then you've extended outside your department with national rescue consultants. Talk to me about the genesis of that. And then what you offer to the people listening



2:12:42

is what rescue rescue national rescue consultants. I'm a a part of it. I am one of their instructors, I do a lot of teaching with them all the time. The owner is actually a great friend of mine, HERBIE Tyler, and his partner is Greg Rogers. And they both work for the City of West Palm Beach, on the career side. Honored to be associated with them and company, we've, they've grown the company over the last 10 years, from you know, just doing some local stuff to be one of the premier leaders and special operations training as far as like technical rescue and hazmat and, and you name it, and this and the sock world. They're traveling 24/7 Every week of the month, there have a representation somewhere of a group of guys teaching a class most recently, we're in, in Canada all of the last 10 days, doing heavy equipment, rescue spectralis class up there with the guys from Calgary. There, the company itself stays very busy, like I said, and they've built it literally on the foundation of a real world training provided by people that have either a been exposed to it or be been around it long enough and assigned to both units where they're giving you firsthand information of classroom experience, where it meets real world experience. And it's fully vetted, and data driven, which is why I suppose I associated myself with them immediately, once I caught wind of it. And we all are just great friends growing up. And I had never worked with him in the beginning of 2013 2016 because I was busy doing my own thing. And then when I saw their direction and the way the company would be carried and how and how selective they were with the instructors that they had. I immediately wanted to be a part of it. I'm so glad I did because it's been one of my career accomplishments I'm very proud of and the people I've met teaching and traveling abroad afforded me the opportunities to become better at my craft because, you know, it's not just the same every time you go out and teach you actually do learn just as much as you teach, and a lot of the cool shit that I brought back home, I would have never learned because if you do not get outside your sandbox, you're going to just be like in some form of incestuous like regional

relationship with the fire service pushed up onto your growth. The second day you grow wings and get outside the nest, and you become a member of the fire service, you start talking to people like yourself, as traveled in pod and met and interacted with firefighters from all across the country do now become part of a much more broad and important and accomplished organization, which is the American fire service, not just your fire department that pays your bills. Are we doing?

 James Geering 2:15:25

Beautiful? Well, my apologies for the misinformation so apologize to the founders of National School of consultants. So just for people listening, what kind of classes do they offer to the fire service

 2:15:36

they offer, they stay very, very in their lane. We all the Urban Search and Rescue classes are provided by nationalist consultants or other group classes confined space classes, trench rescue excavation classes, man and machine classes. They do structural collapse technician shoring classes, every form of special operations class you can imagine down to Swiftwater, rescue and hazardous materials technician you can get through to national rescue consultants. You go online, you check them out on on any type of social media platform, whether it's Instagram or Facebook, or even just on their company website. And they're not a brick and mortar. So you don't come plus you request a class you can host a class and they'll come to you. And we're they're fully functional, fully autonomous and fully certified to teach their classes anywhere in the country. And their phone call away. And as far as California with our trailers, Texas, we did a class two years ago for a toothbrush for Brian brush up in the Midwest, Oklahoma. For his department, we and we drove there from Miami. So we would drive anywhere for these classes you call we haul

 James Geering 2:16:46

you full? Well, I'd love to throw some closing questions that you if you've got a few more minutes. Absolutely. What do you got? Brilliant. All right. First question. I love to ask, is there a book or are there books that you love to recommend it can be related to our discussion today or completely unrelated.

 2:17:01

So completely unrelated I love the book atomic habits is my ultimate read, I read it constantly, I love all the things about it. Building good habits, and why the brain works, the way it works to follow through those habits and internalize those behaviors is the premise of what I teach in the midday mindset side of the house, which is what I do as far as firefighter rescue survival. And the Learn improve and master book by Nick Blaskowitz. Great book, also down my lane. Anything that has to do with the art of attorney education. And I'm really into like the meta learning, understanding how people learn, and why they learn that way down to a nerdy neurological level makes sense to me. So if you're that guy or girl that wants to get real nerdy

with your teaching, or even want to improve how you learn, um, those books are great for you. There's a bunch of other ones that are that are slipping my mind right now. But another one is called Flo, W. That was great as well. And I don't remember, I don't remember the author's name, because it's very complicated. It's a real long name. But guys, those books work great if you're into the nerdy understanding of human learning, and the way the brain works, and I would I would have done with those books and apply them to the fire service, just like we all do. If you're a firefighter, you know, you apply to the fire service if your focus officer apply to you apply to the police service. But you know, you're you're hammering the whole water down, right? So every time I read these books, it makes me a better instructor, because I know how to cater to the adult audience better. And when we teach a skill, we teach a skill away that is going to be learned and sustain, not just mimic and followed for a day and forgotten immediately afterwards. And those books really were the premise of me going down that road altogether, both I actually built the way that I deliver the Mayday mindset and the logic behind it

 James Geering 2:19:04

was speaking to Mayday mindset when I make sure that we don't skip over that as well talk to me about the class that you offer. And some of the myths when it comes to read and made a and some of the solutions or the the updated thinking that you're bringing through your class.

 2:19:21

Okay, so just real quick on the media mindset. I'm just a cliff no versions of it is it's a it's a it's not a real class. It's not a spareparts Bible class. It's a class to teach us why firefighters survival and firefighter rescue must be taught a certain way in order for it to work and stick. The way that is being taught. The linear approach has been normalized across the country is very concerning. And at times very inadequate. When you understand the world outside of the Fire Rescue Service. The Fire Service is a very kind of a goes to be He goes to see linear approach. There's nothing linear about a real world meeting, when human emotions are at play and stress and resiliency are being tested, we have to learn a function a certain way in order to be able to reproduce it under those conditions effectively. And there is an algorithm for that. And the algorithm is exactly what my focus is, when I teach the Mayday mindset, I am not interested in treating the symptom I'm interested in treating and treating the cause. There is there are no guys that are listening. There's a lot of big names out there that teach a lot of things. And they're all great guys. And I love to tell them, and their colleagues of mine, and mentors, and I love them to death. And there is nothing be nefarious being said, but there is very few guys and girls out there that are teaching, firefighter rescue and firefighter survival. And Mayday is the way that it should be taught based on the understanding of human learning, and human behavior patterns under stress. You cannot ignore the most predictable failure in this process, which is the human in the meeting. So in order to address a human, you have to have an in depth understanding of human behavior patterns under stress, which are very predictable, and book, the psychological and physiological changes you're going to be exposed to when you're in a knife fight in an elevator. Okay, once you understand all that what you can do meeting mindset focuses on and we teach new a skill in a way at all algorithm. And immediate school, you've been 10 times. But I promise you this time, it will be done different and it'll make sense.



J James Geering 2:21:44

I heard you talking about this a little bit on the three point firefighter podcast and you mentioned Rick George, he's a friend of mine, and he's been on before. He's definitely someone that understands stress, inoculation and setting the bar high and training. So talk to me about his mentorship.

 2:22:00

Ray George's the top of the totem pole and my little micro focus of the fire service. He is legit, like he was a driving factor. And I've told him this many times. And he's the most humble human being in the world. So anytime I talk to Rick, I tell him man, you're the reason I do what I do. Your conversations are the ones drove me to doing what I do. He is I have no word for somebody who minimizes and personifies everything that I wish I can articulate as an instructor to a student as trying to learn from me. He made me a better firefighter a better human being a better man, a better husband, a better father, that improves me at every level. And I'm and he's going to be like, Dude, what are you doing on the return on that podcast saying all these nice things about, you know, that's what he is. That's the way he is. And he he understand is, he understands this subject matter has such a high, high functioning level, like he shouldn't be a neuroscientist at this point, because he's talked to and met with and spoken to and learn from some of the greatest minds in that arena, outside the fire service. Here I am trying to simplify his methodology for the firefighter. So the everyday firefighter who needs to know why this works for me, understands how to learn, he needs to work for him. Because my approach to teaching is completely built around developing intuition and a reliable Buck reflex. based on evidence based science, and tradition, I can create a reliable gut feeling on a fire ground, a reliable intuitive reaction on the fire ground, a reliable reflex on the fire ground. Based on my training, that was based on evidence based data collection, and science and experience, which is tradition, then I am going to have the greatest possibility for a positive outcome. If I am simply learning a skill, this is where you take care of back office, we remove your mask. This is the way you do this. This is where you do the others wait about a window, and none of those other issues are addressed. Then nothing was addressed. And I just went through the motions, and you're moving on practice has to be purposeful. Otherwise, you're just burning energy and calories and running in place. You're not really growing or learning.

J James Geering 2:24:27

Love it. Yeah, he's amazing. He's someone that got into the fire service kind of late two years a pretty interesting early life, whether that straight that high stress training thing is something that I've seen deteriorate in in some of the places that I work Anaheim held it very, very high. But um, you know, it becomes more of checking boxes. And this is what is terrifying as you talked about some of the events that you've led to not only just the stress of the operation, but also the fitness I mean, you talk about the stair chair evacuation and high rise. You've got people saying it's not fair to happen. Do the CPAP. Well, the fuck do you think you're signing up for? It's not accounting, this is the fire service. And it drives me crazy. So putting that bar like Hialeah did up high and maintaining it and labeling it minimal standards, minimum standards at the front door, you then allowed it, you can hone the skills. And then you again, as you talked about before you have the capacity to then critically think, if you're correct, if pulling across lay or throwing a 24 is still challenging to you, and you have to think about it. You're not as you

said, you're not training, you're just going through the motions, you should be drilling to the point where you can add realism next. And those skills become simply a skill. And now you get to critically think about the actual situation itself.



2:25:44

Yes, yes, yes, perfectly said, this micro Pro, this processor, that is the human brain is not that effective under stress. So by internalizing what you just said, I'm going to echo what you said, by internalizing simple skills, as many simple skills as possible, internalizing them to where they become a reactive function as efficient under stress declared as too critical. At the same time. If all my flippin brain energy is focused on throwing up and playing fulfilled matter, that I have no time to be to remain situation aware. And what my next step is, because all my energy and brain is single pack, or you could be dealing with that matter right now. How do I get rid of that, by internalizing throwing a letter, you throw a lottery enough to 2pm when you throw shit at two in the morning, outside someone's house, your body and brain? What are the difference? They won't know the difference, if you do it at Firehouse at 2pm or somebody else's house at 2am. What it does for you the benefits of that is not only that you're gonna look awesome on scene and kick ass and get your job. But you're also gonna have room and availability for critical thinking, to keep yourself out of trouble. We spent so much time and energy telling and teaching our members how to get out of trouble that we refuse or fail to teach them how to stay out of trouble. This is one of the ways to stay out of trouble, man, freaking train. But when you train, you have to train the right way that you'd have to start small build, create a bridge, perform, and then apply it to the real world and be address. You have to unfollow these norms unfollow the norms, I don't give a shit who's talking about it, insert name here, my name, unfollow anybody's name, adding your beliefs. Understand that you don't know what you don't know. And update your systems constantly update your systems based on evidence based education, data, speed betting and traditions. And I have a column and then just figure it out. Because the only way you're gonna figure it out is by actually getting hands on and doing it. Listen, I can read a book about playing guitar. And not every word, memorize every word in the book, and teach out of that book. But if I never picked up a guitar, I'm still not a guitarist, alright, you have to pick up the guitar, you have to throw the ladder, you have to apply the data, the evidence based scientific shit to the fire ground into the streets. And that's where you normalize the routine, find out what works, edit your beliefs and update your systems. Otherwise, you're spinning your wheels, and you're living in a false sense of security, this is never gonna happen to me. Guess what man? made A's are not like a possibility made A's are a probability, you're probably going to have a meeting. We just lost a young brother in South Carolina a couple days ago. You know, that guy was beat up, he was more prepared than 90% of the people that I deal with every day. And by preparation, I'm talking about the classes and the involvement and the constant. Positive he was going into his tank of education on a daily, he would have every conference I went to that kid was there. And he still got caught up. It should that never happens happens all the time. All right, if you think that that's not going to happen to you, because you work here and there. But you don't do this, you can do that. Or you just you're just it's never been a part of your career. It only needs to happen once, man, I promise you. And don't do that to your family, they deserve better. And don't do, don't put the members on your company in a position to have to go in and save your ass and enrich their lives further. Because we all know the data when it comes to what happens when you join a team. You're burning oxygen faster than everybody else, you're probably going to end up in a mayday yourself, okay, because we're coming after you because you thought it would never happen to me. And then it did. And now you have no plan on how to get out of it. Or your tie

that you do have is one thing you learn, well, six months ago or six years ago, that really doesn't work under stress in the real world. And you're not going to just figure it out. You're in a state of performing and an anxiety and nobody figured it out with their performance.

 James Geering 2:29:50

Absolutely, yeah. And rest easier to James Amala to that was absolutely tragic. pristinely bro. Well, I want to get back to the closing questions then. Thank you for that. tangent, though. Sorry, no, no, no, that's why I asked you this, I wanted to make some space for for your philosophy on that. And that said, you know, thank you. Devastating reason why, you know, thank you. So the next closing question, is there a movie or a documentary that you love to recommend?

 2:30:19

me think about this when I've never had this question before. Back to off

 James Geering 2:30:22

to maybe?

 2:30:27

Absolutely not. Man, I am a huge fan of military movies. I am a huge fan of history movies, any movie that involves some form of example of leadership under fire. I'm a fan of, I'm not a comedy fan. I'm not a off to script, I one of these guys in the firehouse end, quote, movie lines, I'm not that guy. And I just that kind of stuff doesn't stick to me. I'm like, kind of a like a one trick pony. And every time that I create time to watch something, I need to get something out of it. But at this stage in my career, very few times when I watch something that's just for entertainment purposes of it, if I am doing that is because I'm with one of the kids or, or my significant other decided that we were going to have a night out and watch a romantic rom com, but man, anything that has to do simple answer, and it has to do with history, or the military. I just, I really enjoy those. And I look for examples of leadership in those movies when I can, and I try to apply them to the world that I operate in.

 James Geering 2:31:35

So I just watched a show I think it was on Netflix and it was called beef. And I think there was eight episodes. I'm I'm a big fan of again, same as you I want I want to leave a film feeling nourished in some way doesn't have to have like, you know, documentary element to it. But you know, inspiring make me feel bad or whatever it is. I have never seen such a good story on television for never, I haven't seen one for a long time this show. Every single episode goes such a different way. It starts with this road rage incidents got Ali Wong and another actor. And

I've you've seen it yet. But if you want something where you won't feel like you've wasted an hour of your life at the time, and you're actually entertained, and you can't wait to watch the next episode. I can't recommend that. And one of the best things I've seen in a long time.

 2:32:22

Before I will actually I came up in a conversation last night was Stacy at home. She said, Hey, let's watch beef. And I passed on it. So I should have actually said yes.

 James Geering 2:32:31

Well, because initially it looks kind of vague, because there's a lot of things on Netflix. They throw a lot of money at a lot of things. Yeah, yeah, this one's definitely worth the watch. Awesome. We'll

 2:32:38

do brother appreciate the recommendation. All right. Well, the next

 James Geering 2:32:40

question, is there a person that you recommend to come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world.

 2:32:51

If we're going to stay on the lines of like mental health and experience and all that, there's, there's guys that pop into my head like Maddie, Matthew Johnson, Randy Johnson out of Fort Lauderdale. He was just on a recording more show and podcast not too long. But he did a great job, he had a great story to tell. And he's really looking to spread his message. And Timothy Gleason, Timothy Gleason out of the city of Miami. He's also got a great story to tell, I'd highly recommend those to anybody who's has not watched them or had an opportunity to work with them. Please do man, those guys who just both are just gentleman, and he talked about trial by fire those two guys have lifted and done it. Both hands on the personal end and on on the fire department and they can talk to buy anything. And it's relatable, very relatable. No matter how cool you think you are. There's all the cooler guy walks into the room. And as those guys

 James Geering 2:33:45

very cool, thank you so much. All right. Well then the very last question before we make sure everyone knows how to find you. What do you do to

 2:33:51

 2:33:51

decompress, decompress, honestly, these days I exercise, Walk Run, I gotta get away and sweat. If I'm not out, sweating, doing something on my own. With a good podcast or book in my ear. I have a hard time decompressing I'm not gonna lie. We talked about it before have a 10 month old at home. So I'm going to a full caregiver mode 24/7 I joke with the guys in the firehouse and I'm in a constant state of fatigue. You know, because you don't get sleep at the firehouse. You don't get much sleep at home. It's kind of tough right now. It's just a phase I'm in. I know that it's gonna go away eventually. But you just happen to ask me that question during this, this stage of my life. We had this conversation in five years we'll have a different answer for you. But right now getting away from work getting away from that, spending an hour by myself, sweating, getting my heart rate up and listening to something that I enjoy listening to where I can listen and answer. Talk to myself during the process will keep me going but I enjoy that journey. I enjoy that mental journey and picking my brain out for a walk until I call it I don't go for a walk in my brain for a walk and work with the heavy on my back to exercise what? And that's what I've been doing lately.

 James Geering 2:35:08

Fantastic All right within the very last question if people want to reach out to you find you online, even contact you regarding made a mindset where the best places.

 2:35:19

So just for the Mayday mindset oh you can just rob Ramirez at Mayday mindset.com That's the easiest way to reach me. Other than that, I have a Facebook page and I have an Instagram page. On next week, we'll be up in Michigan. The month after that we're in Arkansas, we have a couple of things that we're doing in Florida. I'll be up in the Ocala area. At the US North Central Florida fire conference in December, I'm gonna be keynoting that event. And then in northern North Carolina in November for the Carolina training days, we give you a pretty busy schedule. But since I said I have a 10 month old at home and I'm still a firefighter on the job. I traveled once a month outside the state or in state with a mindset and that keeps me busy enough to where I can work. No be home and get some form of personal professional. Pretty easy to find. All my all my sites are public as easy as fine as James holy cow. But his name and it came up everywhere. But but you can find me you can find me you can find me but not as easy you can find this guy.

 James Geering 2:36:29

It was a weird last name too. There's a lot more Ramirez isn't gearing so

 2:36:33

especially down here brother and highly

 James Geering 2:36:37



James Seering 1:00:17

Well Rob, I want to thank you so much. I mean not only what you've done for the fire service and but but I think more importantly like I said before, there's there's this kind of myth that you and I grew up with, which was you know, a man is this kind of bodybuilder with no emotion. And a lot of our most revered figures in the fire service can be viewed in that lens if it isn't for their vulnerability and their transparency. But you've you've not only told us about some of these incredible cause from the operational side but also from the emotional side too. So I just want to thank you so much for being so generous with your time and coming on the podcast today.



2:37:12

Listen, I appreciate you having me honestly, the the honor and the pleasure is all mine. Anytime that I can do one of these things. I got a pinch myself because it gives me a release from my passion in my opinion. It gives an opportunity to meet guys like you, thank you for what you're doing what you're doing. It's changing the entire first responder industry. A big big fan of your podcast for a long time. And 100% grateful for this opportunity and I wish you nothing but continued success my friend