

MODULE 6:
MINDFULNESS IN YOUR AGENCY

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Police officers are trained to respond and handle volatile, combative, and highly stressful incidents. Officers are equipped with certified field training, proper tools and de-escalation techniques. However, the stress and trauma of that incident has been engrained in that officer's psyche and her well-being for long term.

“Policing is widely considered to be one of the most stressful occupations, wherein organizational and operational stressors put law enforcement officers’ physical and mental health at risk. This stress is often experienced within a context of excessive anger, which decreases officer well-being and has the potential to negatively impact public well-being as well. Police officers are often left to manage stress and anger in a cultural context that does not support help-seeking behavior and that encourages maladaptive coping mechanisms” (Bergman, Christopher, & Bowen, 2016).

As this phenomenon of mindful well-being is ignored and cast aside to “tough it out,” our law enforcement partners are exposed to a multitude of harmful results. “Working in law enforcement can be life-threatening, and not just because of violent encounters. Researchers have linked policing careers to high rates of depression, PTSD, and substance abuse, along with physical ailments like sleeplessness, diabetes, and sudden cardiac death. Officers are more prone to attempt suicide than the general population...because police culture values stoicism, officers are often reluctant to seek out mental-health treatment” (Yeoman, et al. 2020).

Chief Jennifer Tejada explains the stress-related issues that cause the harm and trauma in our challenging career. She explains that, “the resiliency part of it is how are we recovering from the trauma that we experience in this profession? And can we do it and maintain a whole human behind the badge” (Fritzvold, 2020)? Chief Tejada defines

officers' Mindfulness as, "Essentially being aware of one's presence. Being aware of one's thoughts, being aware of the experiences that we are moving through and being aware of the emotions and how we are experiencing our world" (Tejada, 2017). Being mindful is essential to combating the build up of stress that our partners are facing on a daily basis. The invisible enemy also contributes to behavior and anger of officers.

"Stress and anger are significant concerns for LEOs. Effectively addressing these concerns is of vital importance not only for the officers' physical and mental health but also for society at large, given that impaired officers can negatively impact the public. "MBRT (Mindfulness based resilience training) was recently developed to address the unique stressors encountered by LEOs and has demonstrated preliminary effectiveness in reducing both stress and anger among LEOs" (Bergman, et al. 2016, pg.854).

Chief Tejada further explains the Mindfulness benefit "which trains officers to cultivate resilience and enhance performance through training and in self-awareness, self regulation, and compassion" (Tejada & Goerling).

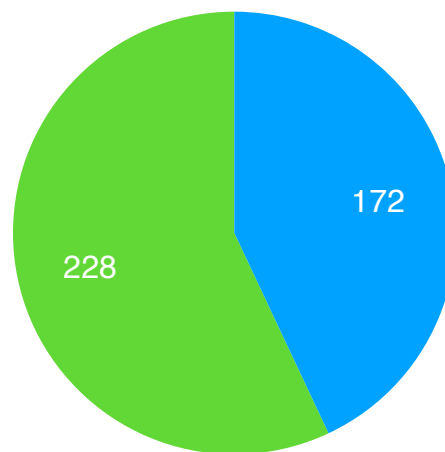
"The Pacific University study... led 43 officers through a MBRT curriculum... which includes meditation, martial arts, and breath- and body-awareness. (It's a police-friendly version of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.) At the end of the eight-week program, the researchers found 'significant improvement' in health outcomes like stress, fatigue, and sleep quality" (Yeoman, 2020). A variety of agencies have used different approaches with MBRT in providing their rank and file with positive decompression.

"In Ontario, Canada...York Regional Police are learning tai chi, journaling, and mindful leadership. The Baltimore city public schools hired the Holistic Life Foundation, a local nonprofit, to teach its police breath work, chair yoga, and meditation during weekly drop-in sessions. In California, Menlo Park City Council...(sent) 29 police employees to a three-day retreat that included meditation, breathing techniques, and the neuroscience of stress" (Yeoman, et al. 2020).

These serve as positive models that we can utilize at the LAPD in order to provide our officers better mindfulness and healthier lives. This will in turn enable our officers to potentially have less issues with anger, more patience with affective de-escalation that can contribute to improved policing service in the field.

"According to a 2015 national survey of over 4,000 police officers, paramedics, emergency medical technicians and firefighters, emergency workers are 10 times more likely to attempt suicide on average than another person" (Ebersole, 2019). Our veteran male officers are the most at risk with suicidal issues. The rate of suicide increased from 172 lives in 2018, to 228 lives in 2019, a 25% increase (see figure 1). Jon Adler, Former Bureau of Justice Programs director at the Department of Justice explained that, "The suicide rampage seized too many officers' lives in 2019, and we need to stop this beast in 2020" (Barr, 2020). "Among the 228 officers who died by suicide in 2019, about 90% were male and approximately 25% were veterans with at least 20 years of service" (Barr, 2020).

● 2018 ● 2019
Law Enforcement Suicides



In combatting the added stress and threat of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, we in law enforcement must be cognizant of our mental well being. “We need to be aware of it and make sure we practice good stress management / mitigation behaviors while off-duty. If we feel ourselves getting overwhelmed...we must immediately seek assistance and support BEFORE it negatively impacts our behavior and our performance on duty” (Borelli, 2020).

“MBRT is an 8-week experiential curriculum designed to help participants cultivate a practical stance of mindfulness to effectively manage daily stressors” (Bergman, et al. pg.853). We can utilize our training cadre to be trained in this arena and in return provide continual MBRT training to our officers in the field. This method can be learned and used as a daily practice for our patrol officers before they deploy on a daily basis.

“In short, there is no magic pill; the key to putting the mind, the body, and the soul in harmony is simply a lot of hard work” (Bernacchi, Drum, Anderson 2019). We

must provide our officers the tools that will ensure their well being, as well as their positive efficiency to our communities.

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