

Episode 187-- How to Build a Gun Violence Prevention Communi...

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SPEAKERS

Matt Gordon, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson



JJ Janflone 00:00



JJ Janflone 00:08

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JJ Janflone 00:37

Hey everybody, welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue and Brady.



Kelly Sampson 00:40

I'm Kelly, one of your hosts.



JJ Janflone 00:42

And I'm your other host, JJ.



Kelly Sampson 00:43

And another week has passed in the United States. And with it, we've seen more mass shootings, more so called "everyday violence", and more folks lost this epidemic of gun

violence.



JJ Janflone 00:55

And while that news is disheartening, what I'm taking comfort in is the outpouring of support from folks across the country, who, whether they started fighting for gun violence prevention decades ago, or just now are stating their commitment to not allow this violence to continue.



Kelly Sampson 01:10

Yeah, that's definitely an encouragement right now. And, and one of those people is Matthew Gordon, or as he's known to his 1000s of followers online, USMC Angry Veteran. As the name suggests, Matt is a veteran, a former rifle and pistol coach to be exact. And now a TikToker who has been using his platform for social good. Most recently, he's been educating his folks around myths about gun, the reality of firearms ownership, how to be a good ally, and also how to fight gun violence.



Matt Gordon 01:42

My name is Matt Gordon, I am a former Rifle Pistol coach in the United States Marine Corps. That was one of my billets. I was in the infantry as my main job. I did nine years with the Marine Corps before being medically retired. I'm married, I have three children, and currently living in upstate New York.



JJ Janflone 02:04

And I wonder for folks who like may not be aware of you know, what is a rifle-pistol coach? Like, what do these words actually mean? Functionally? Can you break that down?



Matt Gordon 02:14

Absolutely. So in the Marine Corps, and I can only specifically speak to that, when you're training to qualify with your service weapon, whether it be the M four, or the M-16. You have people that are on the firing line, helping make real time adjustments to the weapon getting you in and out of your positions, little tips and tricks to kind of help you make sure that you qualify with your weapon, as well as ensuring the safety of the firing line so that nobody gets hurt.



JJ Janflone 02:46

And now to take us to today, you know, how I and other folks that give us rich and found you, you're a Tiktok star.

 Matt Gordon 02:53

So like a lot of people, when all of the country shut down at the height of the pandemic, I was ridiculously bored sitting in my house and saw a bunch of my friends talking about Tiktok and how there's a bunch of funny videos. And so I was like, whatever, I'll jump on there and kind of waste my time on there, since I don't have anything better to do. And I didn't agree with some things that were being said. So I made a video disagreeing and it kind of expanded from there.

 JJ Janflone 03:25

Well, and then for our listeners, I'm wondering if you can tell them a little bit about your Tiktok channel, like, you know, what is your name? And then sort of how would you define sort of the content that you're putting out?

 Matt Gordon 03:35

Sure, yeah. So my handle on Tiktok, is USMC angry veteran. And what I have tried to do with my platform is amplify issues that are not taken seriously because for whatever reason, they're not spoken by the right person. And so I have tried to amplify indigenous creator friends that I have that speak about the MMIW crisis that's happening in their community, and I've utilized I've tried to utilize my privilege to talk about the issues, that the POC community in general faces in terms of police violence, and you know, the Black Lives Matter movement. And anytime that there's a mass shooting, like what we've seen, more and more of, I try to talk about, you know, the absolute need for better gun reform laws in this country. And I'll point to every other country that has done it, and the success that they've seen to try and just really the motivation for me to do that is to just keep the conversation open and not let it fade into the background with all the other craziness that's happening across the world right now.

 Kelly Sampson 04:58

So you make a video sort of stating your disagreement. And you said expands from there. Could you tell us what does that look like? What is the reaction been? How has anything surprised you about how you've been received?

 Matt Gordon 05:12

Sure, yeah. So I actually had this exact conversation with my sister in law a couple of days ago, because one of my videos has kind of gone mega viral on Twitter. And she's like, are you? Are you shocked that that happened that you know, or is that surprising to you? And I told her, I said, like, I'm surprised that anybody listens to anything that I have to say. So when it gets a reception like that, yeah, it's a little, it's a little jarring at times. As for like all the other things that have happened, the reception is always kind of mixed. I've been called a traitor to the, to my oath a few times, and that's always fun. A fake Marine, and I've never had my service questioned more than I do now.



JJ Janflone 05:57

And that's like, for speaking about social justice issues, like people do, like are comfortable with doing that. I mean I know it's the internet.



Matt Gordon 06:04

Oh, yeah, yeah. And it's been kind of that way, since I kind of shifted into the political sphere of Tiktok. Because I don't fit the picture of a guy that's not, you know, 100% behind, we should be able to own any kind of gun that we want. Or, you know, as a veteran, you know, people kind of associate veterans with a certain type of citizen. And when you kind of break away from that norm, a lot of times, it's other veterans that will come at you and say, Oh, you're not a real veteran, you're stolen, valor gets thrown around a lot. That's always my favorite, you know, and people are like, oh, just post your DD 214 on the internet, and, you know, prove that I'm like, okay, first of all, not putting my DD 214 on there. It's got all of my information. And that's dumb. But yeah, it happens quite a bit. Like I said, I've never had my service questioned more than I do now.



Kelly Sampson 07:08

Yeah, so I just want to pick up on something you said previously, because I think it's super important and true. When you said, you know, part of what you do with the position that you hold as a veteran, and as a man, as a white man is you use that to talk about things that sometimes people won't hear if it comes from, you know, a person of color or someone who isn't a veteran. And so I'm wondering, you know, given that experience, and and I can attest to that being true in my own life, sometimes I'll say something and, you know, someone who's an ally will say the same thing. And it's like, oh, so I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how important it is for veterans to talk about firearm safety in particular, or a white man to talk about, you know, firearm safety in particular.



Matt Gordon 07:55

Yeah, I'd say it's ridiculously important. Veterans, especially in the United States are, you know, kind of put on this pedestal with citizens. You know, you can't ever offend a veteran, you know, you better stand for the Pledge of Allegiance, or you're disrespecting the veterans or whatever it is, right. So as a veteran, you're kind of given a little bit of, you know, for lack of a better word, authority, you know, when speaking about things and that's, you know, just kind of the case with things. So when a veteran comes out somebody who is trained in these types of weapons and trained to utilize these weapons and trained to safely store and handle these weapons, to come out and start speaking about how we need to be doing a better job as a nation, protecting people from the weapons that we've been trained to use. I think it holds more weight than just a, you know, an average everyday citizen who just you know, goes out into the woods for a couple of hours in camouflage and pretends he's a patriot.



Kelly Sampson 09:05

Yeah. and like you said. there's sometimes veterans can be used rhetorically. at least as a

pawn in political speech. And you'll see instances of politicians putting words in veterans mouths or, you know, using veterans is almost this mythical virtue signaling, as you said, where it's like, you can't offend a veteran, even if veterans may not be offended. And we saw that with some of the stuff that happened with Colin Kaepernick. You've certainly brought that out in your videos. And so that brings me to you mentioned that you had a video go mega viral. And for listeners who may not know what that video was, could you tell us a little bit about it and what that experience has been like?

M

Matt Gordon 09:45

Sure, yeah. So I had a video that kind of went mega viral over on Twitter was actually a response to somebody else's video on Tiktok. I had put out a video saying if I was in Congress today, here is the bill that I would put forward, and I listed off a certain, you know, certain things that I would say this was what I would do to at least push forward this idea that we need to do something to stop all this gun violence. And I recognized in the video that it wasn't a perfect solution. And it wasn't going to be a blanket solve all answer, but it was something and that's better than doing nothing. Well, somebody had commented or made another video saying that well, you know, as a Marine Corps veteran themselves, my proposals were extremely authoritarian. And this is why they don't trust me and blah, blah, blah. So I made a video saying, I'm glad that you said that you were a Marine Corps veteran, because I wanted the opening to talk about the restrictions that are placed on Marines that are living in the barracks on base in regards to their own personal firearms and laid out how if you were a private to a sergeant, living in the barracks on a Marine Corps Base, and a private to a sergeant is generally somebody between the ages of 18 to 21, or 22 years old, you know, and you're living in the barracks, you are not allowed to store your personally owned firearms in your barracks room. You have to go and register them with the provost marshal's office on base, they then will put them into your battalions armory. And then you will get a receipt from them saying where it's at and when and where you can go and check your weapon out from the armory to go to the range and utilize it however you'd like. But the thought that the United States Marine Corps is so restrictive on personally owned firearms within the confines of their base for Marines, who are trained in these weapons, trained in weapons safety and weapons handling, and they're still not allowed to possess them themselves in their barracks rooms. And yet, any citizen can walk in as soon as they turn 18 years old, and go and buy an AR 15 and 1000s of rounds of ammunition, and just walk out with them and do whatever they want. I felt like that topic of conversation hadn't been spoke about before. And those disparities. And, you know, the people that we assume are the best of the best that America has to offer. The ones that are defending the Constitution and fighting for our freedoms are not allowed to personally hold their weapons in their barracks rooms, was something that I felt was important to talk about when it came to why it's absolutely okay to impose those same restrictions on everyday civilians.



JJ Janflone 12:43

Well, and trained too, because the US military, the highest, not one of these highest trained militaries in the world, but you don't have to go through training to purchase.

M

Matt Gordon 12:50

Exactly, yeah, that you can literally, you don't even have to be graduated from high school. If you turn 18, you can walk into a gun store and buy a gun and walk out with it. And that's the extent of you know, that's the extent of it, whatever you're going to do with it. At that point, we're just hoping that you're not going to go and shoot a bunch of people with it. And to me, that's a problem. We need to do something about that.

K

Kelly Sampson 13:16

And on that note, in your most recent viral video, you actually laid out how you will combat gun violence. If you were in Congress, can you share what you would do?

M

Matt Gordon 13:24

So when I made my video talking about if I was in Congress, here's the bill that I would put forward, I actually spent about a day just kind of researching the way that other countries have implemented their gun laws and the way that you can obtain firearms through their countries. And, you know, for me, I really kind of latched on to the kind of the way that Japan does does their gun regulation where you have to have a certain set of permits, and you have to go through a certain set of training, and you have to have these, you know, inspections and very intensive background checks. And, you know, to ensure that you're not going to be you know, that one person that goes and shoots up a shopping mall in their country, and it's been very effective. Last year, they I think they had like one gun death, you know, in their country. And I kind of liked that model. So what I would tell if I was in Congress, this is what I would put forward, I would say that if you were going to want a weapon before you even go into a gun store, there are three different things that you have to obtain. One is a permit saying that you have sat through an eight hour gun safety course about the weapon that you are wanting to purchase. The second is a permit that states that you have gone to a gun range and demonstrated proficiency and safety with the weapon that you want to purchase. Those two permits have to be updated annually to show that you're not you know that you're still competent in the safe handling of those weapons. The third permit is a document that would state that while this weapon is in your possession, you will safely and securely store that weapon so that if that weapon does turn up in a crime, you're now held liable. And then I would move into way more extensive background checks looking through, almost as if you were getting a secret clearance through the Marine Corps or through the government where there talking with your family, they're talking with your co workers, you know, they're checking your social media, so that if there are any red flags within any of those, sorry, you're not getting a firearm. And I would say that, you know, that would be a good start to a good start to the conversation. And as I said, in my video, when I made these, when I made it, it's not a perfect solution. It's not going to fix every single problem. But it's definitely something and it at least gets the ball rolling.



JJ Janflone 15:53

Well, and to play devil's advocate for a minute, you know, what would you say to folks who would who would hit back on your congressional bid and say, you know, that that's an unfair regulation, you know, it'd be too expensive for folks to access?

M

Matt Gordon 16:05

Sure, I would say that, you know, we spend a lot of money on things in this country already. So I absolutely think that there could be, if we're going to make this a national program, that it absolutely could be something that's funded by reallocating money that's already there to fund this program. And I don't see why that would be a problem. If we can do that, if we could just reallocate money that's already there, don't have to bring in any more don't have to go out and sell, you know, cookies or popcorn to fundraise for it, you know, then we could provide this for people. And if they wanted to go somewhere else, then they could pay for it, you know, out of pocket, if they wanted to go to a different place for that gun safety course. The point is, you know, with those regulations is that it shouldn't be as easy as walking into a grocery store and buying a box of Captain Crunch, to walk into a gun store and walk out with an AR 15. It the two should not be on equal playing fields here. There should be more steps and walking out with a weapon that has the potential to cause a lot of harm to a lot of people in a very short amount of time. So I think that there's, you know, people that are like, well, it's not fair to ask people to do that. It's not fair for people to get shot grocery shopping, either. So, you know, we need to do something. And if that's not the answer, then I would love to expand on that, and figure out a good compromise on how we can make it happen.

K

Kelly Sampson 17:38

And I love your point about reallocating because one of the things that comes up a lot in different cities around the country is they'll do a tally of how much a gun homicide cost the city and it's millions of dollars. And so, you know, we could we could use that money to prevent people from dying and save us money. I don't see, that sounds like a win win to me.



JJ Janflone 17:59

Well, and on that note, too. I wonder how you feel about when people when the conversation just ends because folks say, oh, you know, it's a second amendment issue. We have the Second Amendment. That's it. You know, we can't we can't talk about any sort of regulation or like legislative change here.

M

Matt Gordon 18:14

Yeah, absolutely. I and, you know, people have really started to hyper focus on the fact that well regulated in terms of what the definition of that was at the time of the Constitution doesn't mean what we think it does today. And I challenge that every single time. I'm like, okay, well, let's take the definition from you know, 1776, then, well regulated meant a well equipped, well organized and well disciplined, you know, organization so that people have hyper focused on well equipped, we've got that one pretty taken care of, but the well organized and well disciplined, those are the things that we need to be focused on, if we're going to, you know, continue to push this narrative that the militia within the Second Amendment are the citizens of the United States, and they need to be well regulated, well, then we need to start focusing on the well organized, and well disciplined part of that definition. As much as we're focusing on the well equipped part.

K

Kelly Sampson 19:16

I love the way you put that, you know, well equipped and well organized and well disciplined. And, you know, given that you were not just in the military, but you are a trainer in the military, how is it went to be in a culture where there are civilians who have none of that training, none of that discipline, and they're advocating to be able to carry weapons that are very similar to the ones that are issued to active members of the military without any of the training, what's that like?

M

Matt Gordon 19:50

It's it's a little mind boggling and at times comical to me because when we say like the AR 15 is like the M 16, that is issued to service members. It's not like the M 16. It is almost identical to an M 16. The only difference, and I mean, the only difference between an AR 15 and an M 16 that is issued to service members is that the M 16 has a fire selection that will let you shoot off a three round bursts. So basically, for every trigger pull on that rifle, it'll shoot three rounds, whereas the AR 15 does not have that option. And that is the only difference. So the fact that somebody can literally go and buy the exact same weapon that I was using and had to be extensively trained on in the Marine Corps to be able to not only proficiently use, but safely handle is a little mind boggling to me that we're just okay with it as a nation. And I know that there are people that are against that and are very outspoken against it. But the fact that we continue to elect politicians that refuse to take action tells us that as a nation, as a whole, we are okay with the status quo.



JJ Janflone 21:10

Well, and I wonder what it's like for you on a personal level as someone who, you know, you've been in combat, right, like you've carried weapons overseas. And now what is it like for you, as a father to think of, you know, that when the solutions posed that, you know, somebody's carrying a gun, similar to the one that you carry it, you know, being outside your kids school like that, that's the solution to gun violence, is that strange? For you to sort of hold in your head like mentally, emotionally?

M

Matt Gordon 21:38

I always push back on the narrative of the good guy with a gun trope. Because of one simple fact, the good guy with a gun, quote, unquote, isn't walking around with a sign saying that he's a good guy with a gun. So how do you know who is and isn't? How do you know? And the answer is you don't you know? And if your answer is, well, we just need police officers, you know, they're well, we've seen that be unbelievably ineffective, in preventing any of this from happening. There was a security guard at the grocery store in Buffalo and he was not able to stop what happened there. There were police outside the school in Uvalde, they were not able to stop what happened there. There were police outside, there was a school resource officer at Parkland, he was not able to stop what happened there. So this idea that all we need is more

guns to solve this issue is ridiculous to me, there are 400 million guns in the United States. And if that isn't enough, then I'd love to know what the number is. So that we hit that tipping point where we're now safe as a society.

K

Kelly Sampson 22:49

And there's, you know, kind of going along with this myth about the good guy with a gun. And to your point saying you don't know who the good guy is, especially in a country like ours, one of the things that we saw several years ago, several instances of cases where there was a shooting, and there was a black person who had a weapon and was trying to use it to defend and disarm the shooter, and they were mistaken as the assailant by the police and shot. So that's, uh, you know, in the United States, there's always these layers to it. And so, obviously, as you said, there's the sociological aspects of the good guy with a gun. That's also statistical aspects that show that when guns are increased, you know, gun violence increases. And I'm wondering what other common misconceptions or myths about guns, do you tend to see that you'd like to get out right now?

M

Matt Gordon 23:45

So for me, you know, we've kind of touched on it throughout our conversation here. And it's that this, this ridiculous idea that we just need more that you know, more AR fifteens in the community will make you safer, right? Is the narrative more pistols and purses will keep you safe? You know, it's when you have an excess of weapons, the amount of accidents that happen with those weapons because people aren't trained in how to properly handle and stored them goes up, right? Somebody keeps a weapon in their purse, and they reach in to grab something and they accidentally squeeze off that trigger, and now they've accidentally shot somebody. Well, I can tell you in the United States Marine Corps, that if you have a negligent discharge of your weapon, where you aren't paying attention and you shoot around when you're not supposed to, you're getting disciplined for that, you get MJPed, you can get wrote up, you know, you can get, you know, some heavy disciplines put down on you, especially if it's at the wrong time. So, this idea, and this notion that we just need more people handling guns makes absolutely no sense to me.



JJ Janflone 25:01

And I've been so impressed. I mean, it's comments on the internet, right. But that overall, the sort of conversations that that I see happening even in the comment section of your videos were focused on really, I think seeming to get engaged with talking about gun violence prevention from a number of different aspects.

M

Matt Gordon 25:17

So I kind of am expecting the comments that I get at this point, just for the amount of time that I've been on the app and the things that I talk about, I kind of expect a myriad of comments some way more extreme than others. What I've noticed, in the recent days with the videos that I've put out, regarding common sense gun reform, and you know how we need to address these

mass shootings in the United States, what I've noticed recently is that there's been more civil conversation amongst people, which feels really different than any other time that I've spoken about this issue, I still have the outliers that are, you know, that are way just too extreme to even acknowledge in the comments section, I just kind of let them ramble. But you know, people legitimately just coming to the table and wanting to have a conversation, it's been a little, you know, it's been kind of a feel good thing, seeing people just even people that don't agree with my stance, just coming and listening and having a conversation about it. So I'm hoping, and I'm hopeful that because I'm seeing that in there that maybe this this time is different. And we can actually see something kind of shift to protect our kids in schools, because kind of going back to the question about I've got three kids of my own. And you know, they're in school right now I have a high schooler, a middle schooler and an elementary schooler. And so knowing that my kids are randomly going through active shooter drills in their classrooms, instead of watching a Magic School Bus episode or something is heartbreaking to me, they should, we should be doing more as the adults in this country to ensure that those types of things don't have to happen. And the only way we can do that is if everybody comes to the table in good faith, and wants to talk about solutions, and not pointing fingers and saying, well, and I said this a couple of days ago, I feel like the most dangerous sentence in the United States is, well, this is the way it's always been done. And I'm sorry, but the way that it's always been done isn't working, we have to change it. And we have to change it now.



JJ Janflone 27:47

What I think is just it goes to show that when you when you build a community that these conversations can happen, that folks want to be having these conversations that previously may have been dismissed, because they seem a little taboo, right?



Matt Gordon 27:59

Yeah, absolutely. And, you know, Tiktok is of the social media platforms, kind of the most user friendly when it comes to uploading videos, it can get a little crazy over there, sometimes for sure, sometimes you gotta have a little bit of a thick skin to interact with, especially if you get into this type of content over there, it can get a little toxic at times. But you quickly, when I first started, I was concerned because I am a veteran. And I hadn't had conversations with veterans about these issues before because I knew that every veteran that I knew was not in the same sphere as I was. So I was very intimidated to make that first video. But what I found was that once I made that video, I was inundated with other veterans who messaged me saying thank you for saying what I've been thinking for years now. And so you quickly find that you're not the only person with this thought. And then you start building that community. And it just emboldens you to know that you're not alone. And then, you know, well, in my case, and then I just got louder.



Kelly Sampson 29:11

And we definitely appreciate that. Do you have any advice or thoughts that you would like to share with our audience who may be new or old to gun violence prevention?





Matt Gordon 29:20

Yeah, don't let this get desensitized. Don't let the emotion and anger and sadness and fear that you're experiencing right now fade away because the rest of the world is also on fire. We need to stay focused on this because it's not fair. It's not fair to our children that are having to go through and grow up in this culture of putting the responsibility of their safety and school on them. And it's not fair to society as a whole. To say that we're just not going to do anything because we've forgotten about it. So keep this in the forefront of your mind. keep talking about it, keep asking the questions and keep moving the conversation forward.



JJ Janflone 30:06

I mean, I can't think of a better note to end on, Matt. Thank you.



JJ Janflone 30:11

I don't know about you, Kelly. But this talk was actually exactly what I needed today. So I feel really thankful for Matt, and for, you know, this podcast.



Kelly Sampson 30:20

Same here. I mean, it's just speaking for myself, although I'm sure you feel the same way. It can be really disheartening, really exhausting. To me the ways that gun violence is just continuing, despite the work that we're doing, and despite the work that so many other people are doing, or have been doing for decades. And so, you know, to have someone like Matt, with his background show up and show us that we're not alone means a lot.



JJ Janflone 30:48

Yeah, to know that, like, you're backed up by awesome folks who do want to see change and who are refusing to wait around for it to happen. You know, they're making it happen themselves, and they don't have to spend a ton of money to do it. Right. They don't have to have these huge platforms. They're just sort of organically creating the space for folks to be together. I love it.



Kelly Sampson 31:07

Yeah, and thinking about it intersectionally just does wonders for my heart.



JJ Janflone 31:16

Hey, want to share the podcast? Let's just now get in touch with us here at Red Blue Brady via phone or text message. Simply call or text us at 480-744-3452 with your thoughts, questions, concerns, ideas, whatever, Kelly and I are standing by.



Kelly Sampson 31:30

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