

204-combating-firearm-suicide-amongst-first-responders

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SPEAKERS

Dennis Harris, Steve Albrecht, Steve Hough, JJ Janflone, Kelly Sampson



JJ Janflone 00:09

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JJ Janflone 00:22

Hey everybody, and welcome back to another episode of Red, Blue, and Brady. I'm JJ, one of your hosts, kind of flying solo today, but also kind of not because I am joined by not one, not two, but three amazing guests. Starting off, we've got Steve Hough, of First H.E.L.P, an organization devoted to honoring the service of first responders who have died of suicide. I also have Dr. Steve Albrecht, an expert on workplace and school violence prevention, safety, and security. And then Dennis Harris, co-founder of T-Lock, a smart gun lock company. What all of these gentlemen have in common, despite their work now currently touching on gun violence prevention, is that they are all now retired law enforcement officers and they're here today to talk about not just their areas of expertise, but a really disturbing statistic that has directly impacted their peer group, right, which is the fact that we lose more police officers here in the U.S, every year to suicide than we do to deaths in the line of duty. So full house today, maybe we can start with the Steves. Maybe Steve A you introduce yourself first and then Steve H, and then we'll kick it over to Dennis.



Steve Albrecht 01:50

Thanks. I'm Steve Albrecht, I formerly worked for the police department in San Diego for 15 years as a sergeant and a domestic violence investigator. I have a lot of interest in police suicide. It's something I've been working on for a long time in my career, both the impact on

the prevention and, you know, as part of the violence issue in this country, how cops harm themselves, just one of the tragedies I've been looking at for over 20 years now.

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Steve Hough 02:13

Absolutely. Steve Hough, I am a 25,27-year law enforcement veteran, recently retired, I am currently serving as the chief operations officer with First H.E.L.P, which we're an umbrella organization over Blue Help, Red Help, White Help and Gold Help. So basically, what we've done is we're moving everything to the First H.E.L.P platform and what we do is we provide the services to family members who have lost a loved one, a first responder to suicide, we track suicide data, we've done so officially now for the last about five or six years. And we're an organization that also offers that training piece, because we want to make sure that our first responders are really getting taken care of when it comes to that. We don't want them to get to a point of where they're wanting to commit that suicide. So we're very interested in that, if you will forgive the left of bang scenario, in that we want to take care of them before we get to that point.

D

Dennis Harris 03:12

My name is Dennis Harris. I'm a retired lieutenant with the Utah County Sheriff's Office. I've spent 41-and-a-half years in law enforcement. I spent most of my last 20 years in my 41 years working in the Narcotics Division. Now I'm running T-Lock, which is actually a, it's a gun lock, it's a clamshell-style gun lock, that has an alarm system on it.



JJ Janflone 03:38

Well, and I'm curious for all of you, you know, when you were active duty police officers, you know, was suicide, something that was discussed peer to peer?

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Steve Albrecht 03:47

I can say for me in San Diego police department, I came on in '84 and one of our rising stars was a captain, a woman named Leslie Lord, and she received a community-oriented policing, a national communit- oriented policing award and went home and shot herself her death also happened the same day as a detective in our agency. So to this day, we do not know whether he knew about her suicide, and whether he killed himself as a result of what she did, just as sort of, you know, something to parallel or not. But we had two suicides in one day. And that shifted our approach, in advance officer training and academy training, to insert the concept of suicidality into our our academy. And we've always had a really long term relationship, probably 35-40 years with a psychological services agency, the same one, it's off site, and they went into the academy to start talking about suicide after those two deaths.



JJ Janflone 04:39

I can tell you, from my perspective, coming from the other side of, going all the way across the United States, coming up in the organizations that I come up in, number one, it's the

United States, coming up in the organizations that I came up in, number one, it's in the panhandle of Florida. So a lot of times it gets referred to as lower Alabama, right. We see that the discussion of suicide, it is not, is not something that was prevalent, even to this day, the conversation has definitely taken forefront in a lot of agencies' minds, as well as those steps prior to that too, to ensure their officers or even all of their employees are taken care of mentally, to make sure that they have those services available. Steve A had mentioned that, you know, they have offsite places that officers can go free of shame, they can go there on their own time, all that good stuff. We're just now getting to that. So, kudos to those, those other areas such as California, New York, those little bit more progressive areas that have adopted this early on. But the conversation was never there, the conversation was barely there, when you would respond to an officer's house and his gun was taken apart laying on his table, because he was afraid he was going to do something, even after those calls, that conversation never took place, it was very taboo. So to see these things moving, progressing forward, is really good. It's a really good thing that we see a lot of agencies stepping off into that.

D

Dennis Harris 06:05

Part of the problem is that, you know, a lot of us as police officers, you know, we struggle with wounds, they're called unforeseen wounds, something that, visually, a lot of people can't see that we carry, you know, in our heart and the recesses of our mind. And, you know, we have to be more open as a society to realize that, yes, police officers have a lot of problems, also, as well as firefighters, as well as, you know, other professions. And the more that we can talk about them, the healthier we are going to become, and especially, I'm going to talk about police officers, since I, you know, was there for 41-and-a-half years, it's so easy for us to hide those wounds. Because we want to appear very strong in front of other people, our peers, our family, the public, that we're dealing with, but we are like everybody else also, you know, we feel pain, we struggle, and we have a hard time. And I think as police officers, I think it's important for us to reach out to our friends who are on the force, and if not friends, to therapists so that we can get the help that we need.

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Steve Albrecht 07:28

I gave a presentation with a colleague of mine from San Diego State University, a professor named Brian Spitzberg, and we were looking at the number, 300 an accurate number for police suicides, and as Steve H knows, that number varies in terms of the reporting, but I said, let's start off by saying and I, you know, it was a roomful, a couple hundred people, cops, and I said, if you have ever known somebody who committed suicide as a cop, stand up and a bunch of people stood up. I said, if you have personally had somebody in your agency that committed suicide, please stand up. Bunch of people stood up. I said, if you knew anybody in an adjoining agency, who has committed suicide or heard of it, that situation. stand up. Well, obviously, by the end of that, you know, kind of filter, everybody was standing, they either knew about it, or it happened in their agency, which is just so disturbing.



JJ Janflone 08:13

Well, can we pause for a minute, Steve, on that number? What does that 300 refer to?

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Steve Albrecht 08:19

Isn't that sort of the touchstone for our profession? is 300, a kind of a police suicide number that's always been around?



JJ Janflone 08:26

So, what we have found over the years, and I actually have the numbers pulled up on our website at this point, the closest that we've come to that number is in 2019, where we have collected either through social media posts, agencies reporting, families reporting, or anonymous reporting that we will go and try and verify, 2019 was the highest thus far with 248. So we're at and, keep in mind when we discuss these numbers, these numbers are fluid, right? Because it may take several years before somebody steps up and says, hey, I want to make sure you guys have this information. It takes that long sometimes for family members to come forward with it. They have to deal with it in their own time. So currently, this year, we're looking at 123. I expect those numbers to be closer to the 180-190 mark, as we get closer to the end of the year. That seems to be a staple number that we get reported. But as Steve, Steve A's hit the nail on the head, it's what is reported. So what is not reported leaves a big opening in that in that conversation.

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Steve Albrecht 09:34

I think, JJ, one of the challenges that we all face in this issue is is that there are so many cases where the police chief shot himself while cleaning his gun.

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Steve Hough 09:43

Yes.

S

Steve Albrecht 09:44

Thirty year-veteran shot himself while cleaning his gun. There's so many gun cleaning accidents that happen with people who have been using firearms for, you know, their entire lives, which is you know, how we cover that stuff up. I remember a case in Chicago, either in city of Chicago or around there, where you know, the gun moved off of the officer's locker, it flew through the air and shot him in the head, and then fell to the ground without being touched. Yes, automatically discharged as he was, you know, sort of standing there. So that kind of cover up stuff is done for the discretion of, you know, the pain of the families and for the sort of the sense for the community that, you know, these are warriors that aren't allowed to do these things and shouldn't be doing these things. It's just so tragic, because, you know, the cover-up part is where we need to get past that. You can't get to the help until we get to the past to cover up part.

S

Steve Hough 10:28

Answer Yes comment

Amen. yes, correct.



JJ Janflone 10:29

So I'm curious, if suicide is so prevalent, and it's sort of known, we've all addressed this, why is that? And why is this topic still so taboo? If folks seem to be, you know, kind of well aware of it? Yeah,



Steve Albrecht 10:43

I'll jump on, quick. You know, one of the things that we see with cops is they're, they're within three feet of a firearm 24/7 in their lives, they don't see it as a weapon, they see it as a tool, like a carpenter sees a hammer, that sort of familiarity. And, you know, the other part is, you know, the idea that the average person has four to five, maybe six traumas in their life, and their average cop is exposed to 800. I mean, we have a whole perspective in the profession, big boys don't cry big girls don't cry, and, you know, be sad at home, not while you're in front of other people, and that, you know, there's what my clinician friends call the allostatic load, the bucket is too full of stuff, it's just too full of horrific things. And, you know, you go home and you go, how can these man's inhumanity to man exist like this to women and children, even animals, you know, how can this stuff happen and that we have to expose ourselves to and then, you know, the stigma of reaching out for help, you'll put your career at risk, you'll put your pension at risk, you'll be thought of as less of a, you know, a warrior, that kind of a thing that we've created a backwards sort of solution, which is, we know the problem exists, but we stigmatize this reaching out for help.



JJ Janflone 11:56

Absolutely, yeah, we, when we do our trainings, for responder readiness and supervisory readiness, we provide them a checklist that says, hey, have you ever had to do this? I've done it frequently, done it, maybe sometimes, and maybe never. And then it has a whole list of things, respond to a car crash with a dead body, respond to a dead baby, arrest somebody for domestic violence, da, da, da... And this list goes on and on and on. So at the end of the training, we have them either ball out the papers, throw them across the room or swap papers, and they look at their papers to understand that they're going through the same things. And then one of the things I like to do, is when they get their papers, I go, what do you call this, and everybody kind of looks at me, and I call it Tuesday night. I mean, that's really what it is. It's a Tuesday night, these are the kinds of things that we're asking our law enforcement professionals, our fire, EMS, got to locate the communications officers, they can't get closure on, and that's a whole nother story in itself, but we have to soak in all of these things. And then we go home. And what happens when we go home? You go, hey, how was your day? IT was fine. You don't really want to tell your significant others or your children, guess what dad did today? You know, he had to extract half a body out of a car, or whatever the case may be.



JJ Janflone 13:10

Yeah, or people want, you know, your war stories as entertainment. Right, you know, like that "tell me the worst thing you've ever seen," you know, like it's bar talk and not something

traumatic?



JJ Janflone 13:20

Absolutely. And most definitely, and for the majority of us, and I'll use that term loosely, the majority of us have dealt with that internally, whatever. And, and I can tell you that whenever somebody says, hey, what's the worst thing you've ever seen? They don't get the worst thing I've ever seen. Because I'm not going to, number one, it makes for an awkward conversation, and number two, it is just not something that is, as a law enforcement guy, that is not something that I want to put that burden on somebody else, just hearing about it. Because it's the greatest show on Earth, these professions are the greatest show on Earth, and keeping all that stuff, I like to call it putting a rock in a backpack, we've got to get better at getting these officers, these first responders, to offload that and you get rid of it. Back in our day, it was called choir practice, or something along those lines, right? Where, where we dealt with it with a liquid variety of medications. And we know that's not healthy, and we knew it back then. But hey, we were young, we were gung-ho, we were doing our things. But as we've seasoned, I'll put it that way, we have learned, you know, these things are the things that we've got to be able to cope with. We've got to be able to shake off and get it out of our mind because they don't stop coming. They just keep coming and keep coming and something new is going to replace it. So we got to get our guys in better shape with being able.. guys and gals in better shape, to get those things off their mind, process it, understand it, and move on to the next. And you



Dennis Harris 13:21

And you know that's that's really hard sometimes and even for Police officers to do because I think in our society today, it's one of those things where it's, a lot of people want to package it up and send it back into the recesses of their mind and just try to forget about it, which is not healthy, it is not healthy. It has to be discussed with your fellow officers, with your family, if you're going to get mentally healthy again, those are extremely important steps.



Steve Albrecht 15:15

But you know, when you compare fire and police, first off, everybody loves firefighters, right? They're all the heroes in the community. They do. And then the second part is that firefighters are much more healthy in a couple of ways. One is they drink less and they exercise more, that's one. And then the other is, is they debrief in teams, they debrief after a horrible situation, they come back, they go out as a group and respond to it. And they come back as a group and they talk about it. And so they sit around the firehouse and they say that was horrible and let's talk about it even in their own sort of unique, male macho, female macho way. Whereas cops go on to the next call by themselves. It's, you know, the profession itself is very lonely. And I don't know, Steve, you know, the numbers better than me. But what's the percentage of solo patrol in the United States? Like 85 percent?



Steve Hough 16:19

Oh yeah absolutely

Oh, yeah, absolutely.

S

Steve Albrecht 16:20

I had a partner you know, and because of the size of the City in San Diego, I was pretty blessed to have had really great partners, but a lot of times just by yourself, so you go, okay, I just left this horrible call and I'm going to spend the rest of my night thinking about it. And as opposed to fire, I mean, John Valenti, the sort of, the godfather of police suicide research said, you know, law enforcement is a psychologically dangerous profession. And compared to firefighting, which is so team oriented and team focused, they sleep together, you know, I mean, not the same, you know, beds within the same building, they exercise together, they eat together, they train together, and they debrief together and that we can learn more from the firefighting profession about that part.



JJ Janflone 17:01

Absolutely. There's, without question, fire has, and always have, you know, as far back as I can remember, they have always had, whether it comes to Incident Command, whether it comes to any of these other entities as Steve A was saying, they've got it figured out, they've got it dialed in. You know, also, as Steve A was pointing, the majority of your law enforcement agencies are like, under 50 people, right? So, when we start looking at, especially in our numbers that we have, we start looking at size of departments and whatnot. Sure your larger departments have more people reporting, but per capita, if we took that per capita, with each department, the numbers are staggering, especially when you're talking about an agency that has 20 people, and one or two of them commit suicide. I mean, that is just, there's something there that that is definitely amiss that needs to be fixed.



JJ Janflone 17:58

Yeah, and I would think that a smaller, you know, force would mean that you probably have even more opportunity to be exposed to trauma just because it's a smaller town, so you know, everybody, that sort of thing.



JJ Janflone 18:10

Absolutely. Without question that some of the worst calls that I am aware of now, the the agency, I just retired from, Walton County Sheriff's Office, they put together a peer support team, they put together an off site place with clinicians available for you to be able to go talk to totally anonymous. The worst call that I have heard multiple times going through there is not a shooting, or is not this, it is a child drowning. And the majority of the time, as these officers can relate to that, personally, whether it be through their children, or children of family members or whatnot, those are some of the hardest calls to deal with. At least that's what we saw that short amount of time I was there with their team.

S

Steve Albrecht 18:57

Imagine you go to a drowning, then you come home, as in California and Florida cops, into your own swimming pool. And so you're reminded of your own swimming pool every time you walked by there what you experienced. So you know, that's what cops have to deal with and it's brutal.



JJ Janflone 19:10

Yep. And you know, you can't tell your family, hey, look, I don't feel like it. Just respond to do a child that looked like my son who drowned. You just you can't do it. So there's there's a heavy burden, both at work and at home, that these guys are having to really kind of bear that.



JJ Janflone 19:28

You know, what I'm hearing is that first responders are carrying stuff that happened in the workplace into their personal life. And that makes sense. But I want to take a moment to acknowledge too that, you know, you're taking stuff that happens in your home life into the workplace as well. And I don't want to kind of put you on the spot or put your trauma on the spot, Dennis, but I mean, I know in your case, even after your daughter passed from firearm suicide, you had to go back to work and deal, obviously, with that kind of issue.



Dennis Harris 19:56

Well, you know, for me, personally, it was extremely hard. After my daughter passed away, it was, it was really hard to go back to work. But if it makes any sense, it was important for me to get back to work so I could mentally get involved in the work because the more I sat around, the more depressed I would get. And I felt like I just had to get out there and be productive and get my mind on some other things such as, you know, helping other people. Even though I took off two weeks, I know, I told you before my first day back at work was, I had to respond to a suicide, and that was probably one of the hardest times of my life. I remember after that suicide, going directly to visit my daughter at the cemetery. And, you know, all I did is cry for the rest of that evening. But, you know, I believe in talking about it as much as I can, because I believe it does heal a person, the more you can speak about the problems that are at hand.



JJ Janflone 21:00

And before we move on, Dennis, I do want to thank you for your continued willingness to kind of share what you went through and to share TaLeah's life with us, because I think. I really believe that doing that helps a lot of people. so thank you. The question, though, that I kind of want to move into is that, you know, if we know that this is a massive issue, and I think you've articulated that it is, why is it that first responders don't reach out for help? Is it stigma?



Steve Albrecht 21:28

You know, from my perspective, I make a lot of referrals to employee assistance programs, EAP providers, because they do a lot of work in public government, not just with cops, and you

know, the stigma to go to EAP, once I can get somebody to go, they tend to want to go to all the appointments, but to get them to go to the first one is huge. I think peer support is a better benefit than then EAP. And I think psychological services, if the agency is large enough to have access to those kinds of resources. But I think the larger picture, I would say 50% is the stigma, male and female, to reach out for help. And the other 50% is the career impact. And so I always tell these cops, because I've worked with cops that are you know, at risk. And I always say the same thing, let's save your life first and worry about your career second. Let's take care of you first and your family first, and then we'll worry about your career second, but they always have it backwards. It was always my career, my career, my career, which is, if I can't do this, then I'm not going to be able to do anything. And so they'll hold on to it, you know, with both hands, and both feet, instead of saying, I need to say it's okay to go off work for a couple of weeks and get my head right and go to some intensive therapy or whatever needs to be, the job will still be there. But they can't separate their character and their personality with the job. And so the first thing they do, and this both of the other gents know, cops don't warn. So they don't say what they're going to do, like other people do. And they you know, that's why we're so surprised by these things, he seemed so happy, he seemed like you know, she was in such a good mood. And that's because they've already decided what to do. And they feel better about the decision they made. Whereas, you know, with other people that aren't so invested in their career, they can say, well, you know, my job at the bank is always gonna be there or I can get another job at another bank. And I have to take care of my personal self. But cops don't do that they can't disconnect their personal self. And so I always say, look, let's take care of the job. Second, you first, and sometimes they just don't hear that.



JJ Janflone 23:18

If I can ask you know, why is being a cop so essential to identity? Because you're not the first person I've heard who said that, and you know, I love being a podcaster. But if I couldn't be a podcaster tomorrow, I don't, you know, I could walk away from it, right. But I've heard from a lot of first responders that you know, their identity is being a first responder.



Steve Albrecht 23:37

I'll just say from my perspective, it's really hard to get into the profession. It takes forever to get into the profession. It's highly trained, and not a lot of other people can do it. It's kind of like being a baseball player. I mean, once you get to that level, you're like, this is a pretty prestigious job. Not everybody can do it. That's my perspective.



JJ Janflone 23:51

You know, a lot of people have spent a lot of time telling cops, specifically cops, hey, you need to turn it off. You need to turn it off. When you get home, you need to be Steve, you need to be Dad, you need to be husband. You can't turn it off. You can't because you go to the store and in the store, when you're shopping, there's a guy you arrested last night for domestic violence, because he got out, or you're at the ballgame and the next thing you know, so and so comes up to you and says hey, man, there were a lot of cop cars on my street last night what was going on? Like, like we're supposed to know everything that goes on in in all of San Diego or all of Fort Walton Beach, right? So for us to be able to, as an identity to shut that off, and to just come home, get out of the Superman suit, and just be plain old Steve H, it's far and few

between. I ask the guys, when we train, I'm like, what happens when you hear the dog barking? What do you do? You get up and you go, what's going on? Whereas the Miss' or the kids are going to be oblivious. They're just like the dogs barking. We're always at that heightened alert. We're always in cop mode. And that's that's a hard thing and coming as a guy that just retired in July, man, what a crushing blow to go from being an inspector, being involved in all these different things, and then the next thing you know, it's gone in one day, it's gone. So that that is a hard pill to swallow. And that's a little bit, that is a difficult transition. And I think what you're seeing is you're seeing a lot of guys that are absolutely scared out of their wits of that transition, of if I can't be a cop, I can't be anything. A lot of times when we go out and talk with officers about different things, and they go, oh, man, I went car to car and I was talking to my buddy, that's peer support, that is literally peer support in a nutshell. And that is by far the best way, I think personally, take that with two bucks, and you go get a cup of coffee somewhere, but that is personally the number one thing that we should be looking for because it is effective, number one, and it's easy to implement.



JJ Janflone 24:25

And I want to bring up kind of the elephant in the room maybe which is the duty weapon, the firearm, right? I can hear our listeners right now saying, well, if folks are going through a crisis, or if these first responders are going through the crisis, why don't they just get rid of the gun? Why don't they put the gun, you know, to the side? And I'm guessing, though, that it's not that black and white of an issue, particularly with, you know, cops?



Dennis Harris 26:24

Yeah, it's, it's not black and white. It may be easy for somebody to say, I mean, the gun is a very big part of your job. I mean, you basically have to carry it, you know, you may be going through some difficult times. And absolutely, you know, we all want to see that police officer get some support from peer pressure or a therapist or whatnot. But as far as putting your gun away, obviously, we teach our families that, you know, we, you know, there's a lot of, you know, there's two different types of officers, some will come into their home, and they will lock up their duty weapon, or they'll lock up their duty weapon in their car, or they'll bring their gun in, and they'll lay it down. And they'll say, because I taught my kids, you know, they're not going to touch the gun. Well, that's, you know, that's a bad way to look at things, you know, you got to always look at your gun as, in my case, I, you know, my daughter took my duty weapon, and she shot herself with it, that never happens to me, it happens to somebody else. But now that that's happened, you know, I look at things completely different. You know, if you have a gun in the house, you have a responsibility to keep that gun locked up. There's no room for error. And you may say, Well, I've really gone to the other end of the spectrum, well I have, because I don't want to see anyone else lose a child. I don't want anyone else to lose an aunt, uncle, grandfather. You know, I just, it just can't happen.



Steve Hough 28:02

We know that 97-98% of law enforcement officers commit suicide by firearm. So the question then becomes, without trying to me personally, without trying to push blame off on the firearm, we need to look at everything that occurs prior to them actually picking that weapon up and

taking their own lives. And things such as T-Lock and all those, are great, great ways to put another barrier between that just given them one more opportunity to think prior to acting. So the you know, the biggest thing for me is, I've seen it, I've seen guys tear their guns apart, so they can't use them. I've seen guys give their guns to family members because they're afraid of what they're going to do. I've seen all these things happen. And the the biggest thing to me and the reason that I'm in this organization now, besides helping those family members that have to cope with that aftermath, is the fact that look, we should be able to get to them, there's so many different steps in between there that we should be able to get to them. As a profession, as an individual as a friend, we should be able to get to these folks and steer them away, just that one degree to get their mind off of that, and move them away from that thought of ending their lives.

 Dennis Harris 29:21

Steve, I agree with you 100% on that, and sometimes by having a lock or disassembling the gun or giving it someone is just kind of one step away. So, in which we hope that maybe it'll give them that amount of time to just give it a second thought,

 JJ Janflone 29:39

Well, I wonder then, how folks can support without stigmatizing, you know, people who aren't a member of this peer group, right? How can someone who is kind of outside of this first responder community, how can they best be of assistance?

 Steve Albrecht 29:52

My perspective is I wish we would do some sort of, whether it's Steve's organization, or the lieutenant, you know what he's doing, we would do some sort of public outreach, like we're talking about here with the podcast to say, more cops kill themselves than are killed in line of duty. That is a huge piece of news for most people. I teach trust management for public employees. And I do a lot of stuff in public government. When I say that people think I'm making it up, they go, oh, that's not true. I mean, what is it five, six cops a year, maybe? And when they find out that, you know, higher chance of suicide, as opposed to accidental death, car crash, or motorcycle crash or helicopter crash, or being shot by a crook, they don't believe it, they don't think that actually occurs, it doesn't strike them as is even possible. So, if all we do in this conversation, is just move people to the idea that that's, that's a reality. And that, you know, we can be a fragile, a mentally healthy in terms of mental health, a fragile population, because of what we're exposed to, that maybe people cut us a little bit more slack in terms of the things that we have to do to keep society safe, and, but I just don't think that most people even know that or believe it. If we have a sense of, of the people who are the stakeholders and law enforcement agencies that step forward and say, hey, I've had these feelings, and this is how I coped with it, even at the worst case, situation, and I survived. That's powerful stuff. And if we get some, some sort of approach that, you know, at the post-level in the States, or at the federal level, which is here's a program that every agency can do, regardless of size, whether you're small, you have five people, here's what you do, and you got 300 people, here's what you do, but we don't have the right now.

D**Dennis Harris 31:38**

I think through Police Officer Standards and Training, I think that's a great place to start. I mean, obviously, it'd be nice for it to start at the top with the president through the DOJ and down through, but I think one of the most important places is probably to start with a Police Officer Standards and Training.

S**Steve Albrecht 31:57**

I don't know about you guys, but I mean, we went from no discussion in the academy about stress. And I think we do eight hours now and it's taught by our police psychologists. And so, I mean, just imagine that you look back and you go police stress, well, you know, have a couple of beers and get back out there, you know, the next day, was what the model was, you know, when we all came on. And so the fact that these agencies are saying, we're going to take this and actually insert training time into the subject, and then I think the most important part is advanced officer stuff, which is we get people you know, mid-career, they get exposed to this as well. It's not just a one and done. But you know, I don't think we're there yet. And I'll ever hear from the academies is we don't have the space, we don't have the time. You know, we're so busy with 14 other subjects. And you know, we can't, we can't cram this in there. And I'm like, well, you know, we're making a mistake there.

**JJ Janflone 32:45**

Well, and gentlemen, if there was someone who is a first responder listening today, who, whether they're going through crisis or not, is concerned about this issue, what might you say to them?

D**Dennis Harris 32:59**

The one thing that I would bring up is, and tell them that the conversation with a, with a fellow law enforcement officer or even with themselves, is not easy. One of the things that we've always known, or that we always do, is we can have these hard conversations with Joe, Joe Blow on the street, when we're getting ready to take him to jail or have to tell them one of their family members passed away, but when it comes to taking care of our own, or taking care of ourselves, it's a hard pass to have that conversation. It's a hard thing to walk up, if I was talking to Steve A, and he was having some problems, it would be difficult for me to go, are you thinking about killing yourself or murdering yourself or harming yourself? That is not something we're geared with, to deal with within this community. We're just not ready for it. We're not, we haven't got that mindset there yet, but it's coming. By all means, the biggest thing I would say is, look, it's going to suck. There's just no way around it. But it has to be done.

S**Steve Albrecht 33:58**

In my perfect world, we would train the sergeants to be more cognizant of having that hard conversation, Steve. I would say, look, look beyond your agency for help. Maybe it's you have a city or county employee assistance program, EAP provider, you can get healthcare or mental

health care from your primary care physician or referral, you can look on the back of your medical card and make a call. You can go to church, pastoral counseling, or people that are trained there. I think, you know, the first step is getting them into the idea of reaching out for help. And then the second one is what I talked about before, which is, let's focus on your life and your family and your health first and your job second. We'll find a way to work around the issues that you have, we got to take care of your mental health, your life first. It's not always about your job. Number one, it's your health first.

D

Dennis Harris 34:48

I know this sounds like a real simple solution, but it's not, because nobody wants to talk about it. I shouldn't say nobody, but very few people want to talk about it. But you know, if you I have a dear friend that you're working with, and you know, he's having hard times. How hard is it for you to reach out to him and just say, hey, have you been contemplating suicide? I just had a friend that just did that recently. And, surprisingly enough, that person said, yes, I've been thinking about suicide. So, you know, I think sometimes we just have to come up with a hard question right off the bat. Have you been thinking about suicide? And let me the reason I'm asking you that is because, you know, I've been taught to have a connection with everybody that I work with, you know, I've been taught coping skills, problem solving skills, and with having all these skills, I just want you to know that I care for you and I need to know if you're thinking about committing suicide, because I believe that everyone's thought about it, and and there's nothing to be ashamed about it, you're having a hard time, and let's talk about some ways that you can get help.



JJ Janflone 35:57

I love that you've all mentioned how important having hard conversations is, right? That like, that's the biggest thing, is just making this not a taboo subject and continuing to engage with one another. And so on that note, you know, people want to engage with you, where, where can they find you?

S

Steve Albrecht 36:12

Yeah, I'm at DrSteveAlbrecht.com. That's Dr. And then Steve, and then Albrecht .com. I actually have a little piece from my police suicide speech that I did, the keynote. It's, I have about a about a two minute segment on my website, you can take a look at it, officers can take a look at it, just to see what I'm talking about.

S

Steve Hough 36:30

We can First H.E.L.P everywhere. We can find it at the web page 1sthelpp.org. That's 1sthelpp.org. Of course, you can reach out to us on the old book face because everybody's got to have a book face account, and Instagram, Twitter, and my contact information is on the webpage. And I welcome any conversations. And of course, if you can't reach me, just reach out to contact at 1sthelpp.org And they'll get it to me.



Dennis Harris 37:00

T-Lock, you find that at t-lock.net. And also you can contact me individually if you'd like to, and that's Dennis@tlock.net.



JJ Janflone 37:13

Thank you, you three so, so, so much for sharing both your experiences individually and then your continued expertise in this area. Because this statistic is a wild one. So it's definitely something that we need to be discussing more.



JJ Janflone 37:26

So the biggest thanks in the world to the Steves and Dennis for coming on today. I think the thing that got me the most is this continued discussion of how there can still almost be, maybe not intentional cover ups, but that folks, even within police departments, or amongst the first first responder community more broadly will call a firearm suicide an unintentional shooting or an accidental shooting because it's still so taboo to even acknowledge someone has passed from firearm suicide. That shocks me. And so I think that this is, it just goes to show how important it is to continue to talk about firearm suicide and suicide more broadly in the U.S. in order to help save lives and help keep people safe.



JJ Janflone 38:15

Hey, want to share with the podcast? Listeners can now get in touch with us here at Red, Blue, and 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 38:26

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