Officer Down

The Stress of Wearing the Badge & the effects of compassion (combat) fatigue
Quote of the Day

Learning is what you remember after you have forgotten everything I said.
AH-HA
Disclaimer
That which is to give light must endure burning – Victor Frankl
Combat (Compassion) Fatigue

- What is it?
- How do I get it?
- Does anyone else have it?
- Is there anything wrong with having it?
- What can I do about it?
- How can I prevent it?
You Are Not Alone

Ricky’s Story
Where it all began for me
BURNOUT

- The chronic conditions of perceived demands outweighing perceived resources
- Emotional exhaustion
- You just don’t care
- Reduced personal accomplishment
- You do not like what you do
- You do not want to do what you do
COMPASSION FATIGUE

- The chronic conditions of perceived demands outweighing perceived resources
- Helping trauma victims & ongoing exposure to suffering
- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced personal accomplishment
- You like what you do
- You want to do what you do
Where did it all begin for you?

- Law enforcement
- Corrections
- Military
- Family of service
Why Law Enforcement

- Filled with optimism & enthusiasm
- Adventure
- Protect
- Honor of the profession
- Self-satisfaction
- To give back
WHAT WE KNOW FOR SURE ABOUT COMPASSION FATIGUE

- It is an occupational hazard
- Compassion Fatigue exists on a continuum - there are times when we are more resilient than others
- At any given time there will be LEO/investigators that who are feeling well, a majority of people feeling some symptoms and some who are thinking of quitting the profession or worse
- Prevention and post-trauma interventions are needed
Who is at risk?

- Crash Scene Investigator
- Reconstructionists
- DUI and DRE Practitioners
- Traffic Enforcement Officers
How do I get it?

- Violent offenders
- Continual confrontation
- Constant exposure to uglier parts of humanity
- Motor vehicle fatalities & late night notification to parents
- Exposure to preventable death & destruction
- Lack of justice in the world
Extreme Physiological Factor

- Hypervigilance roller coaster
  - Hypervigilance to threat
  - The Inevitable physiological exhaustion after each shift

- Conflicting roles
  - Street fighter, DUI investigator, vehicular homicide AND
  - Emotional support to victims, families, etc
ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

- Low pay (not being included in increases)
- High case loads
- Agency bureaucracy
- Unreasonable, authoritarian commander
- Turnover, recruitment and retention
- Entering the “dark side”
- Lack of training
OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- Public maintains high expectations for performance
- Public scrutiny
- High demands
- Exposure to trauma
  - On average over the course of a career 900+traumatic or severely stressful events.
Has the job changed you?

- You have been changed forever

Septic Tank
Trauma Exposure

- Isolation
- Individuals are capable of unbelievable deceit
- Everyone is a liar
- Everyone looks a little shady
- Anticipatory stress – what is it?
In my mind everyone was a sex offender
The Rescue Legacy

- Baby Jessica, 1987
  - 18 months old
  - 8 inch diameter well
  - 58 hours
Imposture Syndrome

- To know all
- To be perfect
- Withstand intense scrutiny
- Your behavior off-duty will be expected to mirror your on-duty behavior
Rachel Remen

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet”
Truth

- Continuous exposure to human misery will change who you are!
SOCIETY

- How society views you
- How the media portrays you
- Inconsistencies of the criminal justice system
THE LEO/INVESTIGATOR

- We all have a story to tell

- When you have experienced first hand a trauma as a child and/or
  - #1 predictor of compassion fatigue

- When you have experienced first hand a trauma as an adult
THE LEO/INVESTIGATOR

- Personal life circumstances
- Personal coping strategies
- Level of training
- Too long or too short in the field
THE LEO/INVESTIGATOR

- LEO/Investigators have high expectations of themselves
- LEO/Investigators have their own beliefs about the expression of feelings
Fact

Stress is hazardous to your heart
Impact of Extreme Stress and Trauma on LEO Health

- There are approximately 1 million police officers in the US
- There is a dose response to illness (+1)
- Highest risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer – stress response affects all body organs
- Higher body mass index and tobacco use
- Average age of death is 66 – 20 years younger than the average male
Another Study

- LEO at age 50 expected to live 8 more years whereas a civilian would be expected to live an additional 35 years.

- A male police officer 50-54 had close to a 40% probability of death compared to a 1% probability in males in the general pop in the same age group.
I had gained 75 lbs and grew by 77 inches
Coping Skills

- So much of what the LEO/investigator deals with is unnatural and painful, must learn to dissociate.

- The critical problem with this skill is we cannot selectively choose to suppress only the harmful and unnatural.
Rod

- Retired on duty
  - Burnout that wears a uniform
  - Makes everyone else's job harder
The Gift of Fear
THE EFFECTS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Exhaustion
- You no longer enjoy the things that used to give you pleasure
- Hypersensitivity or insensitivity
- Increased cynicism at work
- Anger and irritability
- You believe that you have do not have time to be proactive
- Difficulty separating work life from personal
- Increased use of alcohol and or drugs
- Absenteeism, missing work, taking excessive sick days
- Problems with personal relationships
- Depression
- Suicidal thoughts
It is time to talk about it

- Suicide risk
- Divorce rate
- Heart attack rate
- Stroke rate
- Depression rate
- Anxiety rate
Suicide Risk Assessment

- Psychological stress
- Witnessing or experiencing traumatic incident
- Access to firearms
- Isolation
- Family or marital problems
The Badge is Heavy

- Suicide is the leading cause of death in active law enforcement officers – 12 officers a month
- If we add corrections officers, retirees, fired, reserve officers – every 22 hours
- Police officers have suicide rates that are as much as 3 to 5 times higher than the general population
Firearms are the most common method of law enforcement suicide.

Police officer suicide generally occur at home, away from the work place.

Over 80% of police officers who die by suicide had communicated their intent to others.
- Average age for a police suicide is 42 years old
- Time on the job averaged 16 years
- 96% of police suicides were males
- Guns, overdoses, and hanging
The Badge Is Heavy

- Police officers are 8 times more likely to die by their own hand than by homicide. (University of Buffalo)

- 70% of 1st marriages end in divorce, 85% of second marriages
The Statistics We Don’t Talk About

- For every suicide there are approximately 135 left behind people “loss survivors”

- Suicide often begets suicide

- How many of you?
COMPASSION TRAP

- When you are doing your best and your best is not good enough
- Stigma related to mental health
- Code of silence
- Fit for duty
Truth

- It is going to hurt when we work with people who are hurting others
PTSD

- Primary trauma history is going to determine how susceptible you are to secondary traumatic stress
- Someone else’s pain can trigger my pain
- Someone else’s pain can increase my anxiety
- 19% of all LEO’s have PTSD
- Depression & Anxiety medications the most often prescribed medications on LEO health insurance
PRIMARY TRAUMA

- When you have experienced first hand a trauma as a child and/or
- When you have experienced first hand a trauma as an adult
- Primary trauma history is going to determine how susceptible you are to secondary traumatic stress
Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Criterion A: witnessing or gaining knowledge of a traumatic event
- Criterion B: intrusion
- Criterion C: avoidance/numbing
- Criterion D: arousal
Contributors to Poor Health Outcomes

- Stress
- PTSD
- Shift work
- Obesity
- Sleep disturbances
- Environmental Work Exposures (firearm lead exposure, fingerprint powder, air pollutant in traffic, etc)
Life Sustaining Vs Life Draining

- We must first get air to give air
5 Sources of Stress

- Personal life
- Pressures of law enforcement work
- Attitude of the general public toward criminal justice and LEO’s
- Operation of the law enforcement organization (policies and procedures)
- Operation of the criminal justice system
For the Better or Worse

- Continuous exposure to human misery will change who you are!
  - It is up to you
Symptoms

- Mentally & physically tired
- Insomnia
- Chronic physical ailments
- Weight gain
- Loss of confidence
- Relationship difficulties
Symptoms

- Diminished sense of purpose
- Reoccurrence of nightmares
- Sad
- No longer find activities pleasurable
Roadblocks to Prevention

- LEO/investigators may have fears of judgment or ridicule from peers
- LEO/investigators may have illusions of being all able
- LEO/investigators may have difficulty trusting others
- LEO/investigators may feel guilty or selfish for wanting time off
The Six R’s to Stress Management

- Responsibility
- Reflection
- Relaxation
- Relationships
- Refueling
- Recreation
BE PROACTIVE

- Plan for your day off
- Exercise
- Good nutrition
- Pets
- Gardening
- Sleep
- Quality time with family and friends
Prevention Toolkit

- Compassion satisfaction is the antedote
- What stress relief strategies do I enjoy?
- What stress reduction strategies work for me?
- What resiliency strategies work for me?
- On a scale of 1-10 what does a 4 look like, a 9 look like
Hazmat Suit for the Soul

- Supportive staff relationships
- Self care health maintenance efforts
- Confident/perseverant frame of mind
- Improve optimism
Resilience Promotion Activities

- Mindfulness based training
- Controlled breathing technique to regulate psychological stress responses: cardiovascular, respiratory, stress (cortisol) hormones
- EMDR
- Relaxation exercises
- Keto
Is Your Glass Half Full or Half Empty?

Opportunity is nowhere