Professional Development and Wellness Programs

Speaker 1: You are listening to a SAFLEO Sessions Podcast, a production of the National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers Program. The SAFLEO Program is funded through grants from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, BJA, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The points of view and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the podcast authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Here's your host.

John B.: Hi, I'm John Bouthillette. I'm a lead instructor with the National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers Program through the Bureau of Justice Assistance and host of this edition of the SAFLEO Podcast. I'm joined today by retired Captain Brian Nanavaty, a 33-year veteran of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department. Before I get going, just to let you know—on top of Brian having a distinguished 33-year career with the Metropolitan Police Department in Indianapolis, he has trained literally thousands of officers, supervisors, executives, and clinicians in the areas of personal and career survival and has been an instructor with the VALOR Program for the past two or three years now. He's also taught at Safe Call Now, he's taught at the IACP, ILEETA, IADLEST, NOBLE, FOP, and FBI conferences all across the country. And he was instrumental in the development of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department Office of Professional Development and Police Wellness, or as we kindly refer to it, the OPDW, right Brian?

Brian N.: Yes, sir.

John B.: That's what we call it. In 2015, Brian and his agency the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department received the Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, Destination Zero Award for the work that they have done on this topic of officer wellness with their agency. And I appreciate you being here today, Brian. How you doing?

Brian N.: Good. I'm doing great. Thank you, John. It's praise, indeed.

John B.: And listen, before we get started, Brian and I have spoken a lot in the past, and hopefully you'll see some of that or hear some of that when we talk today on this topic. But, I'm going to quote something, Brian—and I took this directly from your training, and it was profound to me as a leader, as a retired chief. And it was basically a quote from Bill Westfall, who is a leadership guru from the state of Indiana—does a lot of leadership courses, and I've taken this from your agency.

And he said, "We have observed that police officers often suffer death of the police spirit brought on by the paradox of their courage and commitment on one hand, but the other futility of their efforts on the other. It is your responsibility as a leader, mine as a leader, to ensure that this does not happen." I thought that was profound, Brian. And I got one step further. Not that I'm better than Bill Westfall—but to say, it's not just the responsibility of the leader. It's everyone's responsibility to ensure that doesn't happen—that we don't lose officers to some sort of emotional or physical wellness problem. Do you agree with that?

Brian N.: I would agree. You're right. It's beyond leadership or the agency—it's at every level of the agency. It's unions, it's support systems, it's the politicians, it's the critics of law enforcement, academia. Everybody needs to be on board. We say we need to get the right people on the bus because obviously, if we're not in a crisis period right now, we're awfully close to a perfect storm of things happening. We're losing too many officers and not just to self harm—we're losing them, they're leaving this career. And we're not attracting them to this career, either. So, John, it really does. It

really depends on taking a long, hard look at the issue of leadership.

John B.: And I like the way that you use the—on the bus concept. And I think that's huge. I think you nail it with that concept of everybody needs to be on the bus and get this resolved. And again, we always talk about employee wellness and development is just not words—it has to be actions, correct?

Brian N.: Absolutely. And it can be the small things, too. It can be something as simple as a small tweak in a policy that will help morale, that will help somebody over that speed bump in their career.

John B.: Yeah, and it's interesting Brian. So, our listeners understand this—there's always a saying, "Somebody had to start this." Somebody had to take that first step towards officer wellness. And I have to say that you started this process in 2010, right? With your agency?

Brian N.: Yes, fall of 2010.

John B.: So, fall of 2010—tell me what your why was. Why did you decide now, at this point in 2010, that the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department needed to take an active approach to officer wellness?

Brian N.: At the time, I was a field captain working late shift, and I had a few officers who were struggling. Struggling with challenges at home and at work. And I started working with them, and the process of trying to help them become healthy at home and at work—we discovered resources that were helpful. We discovered protocols, methodology that would be helpful. And so, credit my unit, and credit my administration at the time. They came to me, and they saw the difference we were making with a handful of officers, and so they said, "Well, can you work with Officer Jones?" And we worked with Officer Jones, and lo and behold, we had some success. By the fall of 2010, I was working with so many officers and trying to build so many progressive type of creative programs, that it really just happened overnight where it just became that was what I was going to do—and I was going to do it full time, and I did it full time until I retired in January of 2017.

John B.: And you used a couple of the words that I like—is keeping them healthy, which I think that's huge. And we can talk about that in a little bit in greater detail—but keeping them healthy. So, let's talk about it. In 2000, we talked many times. And you said the beginning, you used to go out to these conferences and tried to talk to people about in the early days—2011, 2012—and talk about this concept of professional development and then police wellness. And what was your reaction in the field when you first started to get this to try to move outward, outside your agency?

Brian N.: Oh, I'm not shy about telling people that. I'd be in a big room that could hold—theater-style seating room that could hold 200 people, and I get five people and two of them would get up and leave because they were in the wrong room, and then the cleaning crew would come by and think that we were empty, and they would start emptying trash cans and putting chairs on top of tables. And I'd say, "Wait a minute, I'm doing a presentation here." But that's not the case now. We've seen—

John B.: By the way, thank you for that because, Brian, your diligence and the program you developed—but thank you for just not walking away when it seemed like it was your darkest time. Because at the end of the day, what we've realized is the whole concept of professional development and police wellness encompasses so many different aspects of this law enforcement profession and that includes officer safety. It includes career safety. When we first met, we talked in terms of healthy hire, healthy retire, correct?

Brian N.: Correct.

John B.: And that's interesting, because you decided you needed to cover this on the entire spectrum. You weren't looking to put a pin in any spot along that linear line of a person's career. You looked at, holistically, from the date of hire, and even past the date of retire, I believe—this program, correct?

Brian N.: Well, that's true. Those are very soft boundaries because, actually, we expanded to conditional offers of employment. So, really we

were getting involved with individuals pre-hire. And then, like you just mentioned, there's not a period at the end of the sentence when you retire. Many retirees are experiencing family health, mental health, financial distress and still could benefit, do benefit from resources in those areas.

John B.: Yeah, and I think that's interesting, too because a lot of people think there's some light switch moment in your career from beginning to start where you can turn on or turn off this profession that we've both been involved in for decades, and it just doesn't happen. We see so much, we get involved in so much that it's not that career where you can just walk out at the end of the day and retire and say, "Yeah, I'm good with that. I'm going to leave that alone." I'm speaking from experience, Brian, and I know you are, too. This job is consuming, all consuming. So, it's hard to say that you can walk away.

Brian N.: Well, it's dysfunctional, John. And I use the analogy of an individual who has smoked cigarettes, cigars, chewed tobacco their entire life. And they go in for a chest x-ray, and their doctor says, "You see this? This is the result of you not taking care of yourself." And so, whatever method you use to quit, you quit, and two years later, you have another chest x-ray, and your x-ray is clean. And your doctor says, "See? If you practice healthy practices, all this will go away."

And I equate that to the law enforcement career. If you retire, or you start practicing healthier things prior to retirement, you can clean that x-ray up. The problem is how do we go about doing that. Because you and I are going to get into a discussion here somewhere in the next few minutes on the fact that even we have resources, they tend to be just resources aimed at people when they're already in crisis. And in many cases, that's too late.

John B.: It's so interesting, Brian, because you're a VALOR instructor. You know, we talk about the concept of left a bang a lot in the VALOR Program. And for those who don't know, not getting into a big discussion about the concept of left of bang, left of bang is what I call a proactive approach to everything we do in law enforcement.

It's, again, back to that linear equation. Bang is a place no one really wants to be. Bang is a place where the bad things happened.

So, we look left of bang—that's all the things that we can do on a proactive level that can help us avoid being part of the bang or getting ourselves placed on that x, that spot where bad things happen. Everything right of bang, that's not good because, basically, we've lost any potential to be proactive, any chance to avoid a problem, and now we find ourselves in the problem. And then it's that much of a longer journey on that side of the equation to get back to normal. So, when you say that, it's fantastic.

And I want to keep people remembering that this whole concept is how to be proactive. How to get into that preventative maintenance mode, and how we get this done. So, let's get everybody in the bus today, Brian. You up for that? Let's get as many people on this bus as we can today when we talk about officer wellness, and let's start. I've got to ask a simple question: what is the Office of Professional Development and Wellness at the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department?

Brian N.: Well, it's evolved since 2010 and actually, in truth, the name of the office was the Office of Professional Wellness. And we realized about a year into it that we needed to do more than just wellness, and so the development was inserted. But still, development was secondary to wellness. And again, we had this pressing involvement where we realized that, no—development is the key.

So, looking at the title of the office, it's the Office of Professional Development and Wellness, meaning development is more important than wellness. And again, that goes back to what I just said a few minutes earlier. If you look at wellness as approaching people early, or late, the better way to do business is early. But even better than early is to develop our people from the first day of hire, and this is where we sometimes drop the ball in our academies. We tend to focus on the technical, on career survival, the tactical—

John B.: Which is important.

Brian N.: There's no question. That is paramount. But we forget about the personal survival, the family survival—doing those things that will keep us healthy. John, I can't remember—it's been a long time, but I can't remember if it's algebra or geometry, but there's an x axis and a y axis, and they cross at some point. And the x axis—the pain you experience in your life, and that tends to increase. And the y axis is your ability to cope, and that tends to decrease—especially when you're put into this Petri dish called a law enforcement career.

And so, when your ability to cope is decreasing and your pain is increasing, what do you think is going to happen? Eventually, you're going to be in crisis. Now, we look for red flags. We look for those early signs. But what if we could create a system where those lines never crossed? You continued to increase or at least remain static—your ability to cope, and you're able to recognize your pain or when you're sliding away from a healthy embodiment, but you don't allow those lines to cross. And that is what development is, that is what proactivity is—keeping yourself healthy so you're not in crisis.

John B.: That's all that left of bang we just talked about, Brian. And again, the interesting thing is—and one of the things you talk about in the wellness class you teach as part of the VALOR Program, is that whole concept of preventative maintenance, right—is that we spend more money on preventative maintenance probably in our vehicles, and our radios, and our computer systems than we do with the actual people who operate those systems?

With the people who drive the cars and operate the computers and use the radios—we'll spend more money on that preventative maintenance than most agencies do than on the people. And like I say all the time, there's not a single vehicle that pulls out of the back of any headquarters in this country, there's not a single uniform that walks out that back door of any headquarters in this country, without a person being in it. It's a human process, correct?

Brian N.: Absolutely.

John B.: So, preventative maintenance is key. And that's where we're going with it.

Brian N.: That's how you keep your immune system strong. That's how you don't see yourself falling into crisis. Now look, there are things that are so traumatic in our lives—all the preventive maintenance in the world, they may not prevent them from occurring.

John B.: Exactly.

Brian N.: But still, that being said, in most cases, if you practice healthy practices, you will not find yourself susceptible to the harmful aspects of what you're going to experience in this career.

John B.: It's so interesting, even with that concept, right? Because you think about—for years, we've been told if it's predictable, it's preventable. You've heard that saying a million times in your law enforcement career. And I think what we're trying to say here—if it's predictable, it's manageable. Because at the end of the day, you're going to see things that are definitely going to challenge you emotionally in this job. And as much as I try to prevent you from seeing them, it's how do we manage that crisis?

How do we enhance that resiliency of the officer so that there's a positive outcome when they experience some traumatic event inside their career? I think we need to look at the managing of crisis, the managing of emotional intelligence and critical thinking of our people, and then I think that's the answer to the long-term success of anybody who decides to be part of this career.

Brian N.: What I recommend to agencies—what they do is, when they have officers in crisis, let's say you have an officer that leaves. You have an officer that is involved in a shooting and has to apply for disability. You have an officer who participates in self harm, whether they survive or don't survive. To do a post-mortem of those officers and ask yourself, what are the common themes there? Because, like I said, it's not rocket science. And then ask

yourself, do we have resources that would have helped us with these officers? Because when we lose an officer, we all fail.

John B.: Yeah. I agree with that.

Brian N.: And fail is a bad word, but when an officer quits, or resigns, or we terminate them, nobody's dancing in the hallway like they've won a big victory. This is a failure of everyone. And so, how do we avoid that is the question.

John B.: So, yeah. Let's break down a little bit more what you did over at Indianapolis because I know the big things that's actually in the term, in your unit. The title, professional development—and I'm sorry about that. What are we talking about when you say professional development? What are the concepts you're talking about there?

Brian N.: Well, there's several things. And, again, it's developing proactive programs from a health standpoint, from a family standpoint, from an educational standpoint. We're constantly looking at those common themes like I just mentioned and saying, "Okay, what can we do? If we have officers who in their third and fourth year now all of a sudden all their meals are fast food, or they're eating junk food, or they're not exercising, are there ways that we can practice diet, nutrition, exercise, sleep, health?"

And the best way to do that is by introducing programs at your agency. Education—constantly looking at these themes of how our people are devolving, and then combating that through education. And so, education is key in those areas. Family issues—do we invest in our families? I'm not going to preach to anyone, but if we don't invest in our families, then are our families going to be there to support us when we have those moments of crisis in our career? Probably not. And again, I look back at the number of officers I worked with. The disintegration of the family was a huge issue. It's the number one issue that officers seek out EAP appointments for—family and relationship issues.

And part of that comes from officers admitting up front that we don't invest in our family. So, a key element there, John, is recognizing what those common themes are and then educating your officers that these things could happen to you during the course of your career, and here's what you do now to prevent that. But also, if you're in a situation that we've identified, here's what you can do from this point on. So, it's education, it's identifying resources, and really that's the key—education being the proactive part, resources being the reactive part.

John B.: So, there's a word that gets thrown around a lot—is resilience. Okay, how do we make our officers more resilient? Is that what we're talking about here?

Brian N.: Absolutely it is. But people make it more complicated than it needs to be.

John B.: I agree.

Brian N.: Resilience is wellness. It's practicing health-related issues. But again, John, you and I have talked about this—when we say wellness or we say resilience, the thing that pops into people's heads is physical wellness. Oh, okay, I need to go to the gym. But it's much bigger than that. So, again, it goes back to these major themes: diet, exercise, sleep, nutrition, family, mental health—the things that we can do from a proactive or reactive standpoint. And then, that's from an individual standpoint, but how do we tackle that now from an agency standpoint? You see, there's a word that I like to use, and that word is partnerships. If you develop a strong partnership at home, and we create strong partnerships at work, we will have much healthier officers, we will have healthier communities, we will have healthier agencies, we will have healthier families.

John B.: Yeah, it's interesting because a lot of times—what I do, the instruction and lecture circuit that I'm on across the country with the VALOR Program, I hear a lot of people want to say resilience is one's ability to bounce back. I get that. I understand that process. But really, what we're talking about here is resiliency—not only

being able to bounce back, but realistically, resilience is the ability not to fall in the first place. So, how do we teach them to avoid those issues that we just talked about, and not get caught in that failure chain?

And also, if they do end up sliding or slipping as you said, to be in an agency that is able to identify that and help you from falling and get you back to where you need to be. So, I always look at resiliency as being two pieces. And I think that would make all of our lives a lot better. Would you agree?

Brian N.: I agree. Now, look. We're always going to have some people in crisis. So, we always do need to understand how to respond to them—whether it's early or in the later stages of crisis. But yes, the proactive part—the what can we do from the first day of hire? What can we do when those letters of conditional offers of employment are sent out? So, breaking those myths and those patterns that we can't make it to retirement healthy of body, mind, spirit, family.

John B.: Yeah, and to have those honest conversations—which, I can't remember that conversation. I first started this job back in 19-whenever-it-was. And I don't remember it enough 20 years after I got hired, if anybody talked about it. There was accepted norms, and those norms were counterproductive to our health, to our wellness. That was the nature of the career. I'm glad to see that we're changing that a little bit. So, we talked about your agency, Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department—you did that resiliency training, and you educated your officers on that, correct?

Brian N.: Yes, we did. And, again, you talked a few minutes ago about the stages of approach. And I tell people that you can create crisis resources or a crisis-based program, but then you're always going to be responding to crisis. You can create an early intervention program, maybe looking for red flags. And that's what wonderful, too. But the best way to do it is to develop your people from the first day of hire, but understanding that you probably need all three of those components in a program.

John B.: So, that's the next piece I was going. Because I know that the professional development, that resiliency piece, that training and education for you, which is impressive, from the conditional letter of hire—from that point of conditional employment past retirement, that you also were big on mentoring, correct?

Brian N.: That's a huge part of what the development area of our program is.

John B.: And to go with that, what did that entail? How did you get that off the ground from—man, you're blazing new trails here, Brian. How did you get a mentoring program to get off the ground? Time for the tough questions, Brian.

Brian N.: No, it really wasn't that hard. That's what I'm laughing at. So, I was able to find some information on police mentoring programs, but when you're looking for information on mentoring programs, you typically find information on university or college-based mentoring programs. But they don't really pertain to recruits in a recruit academy or law enforcement officers.

John B.: But it's the same process, though, right? We're looking for a way to help them assimilate.

Brian N.: It is. And the key is to—very much like identifying individuals who will make good field training officers, or good front-line supervisors. You have to identify good caring people. There's no better way to help your people develop. And once you create a program and pick good people and pair your new hires with those mentors, you can accomplish so much.

And I'll tell you up-front that there was a little bit of a push initially from the training academy and RFTO Program that for us to wait to assign mentors until they were out of the academy and the FTO because they thought that would interfere. And it wasn't a year later that both programs came to us and said, "Yeah, why don't you go ahead and do that in the academy? Because we see the value of assigning mentors and having that resource—being able to utilize that resource while this individual is in the academy and in the FTO Program."

John B.: I'm so glad you brought that up because everybody has a role, correct?

Brian N.: Correct.

John B.: And a mentor's role is not to be the field training officer, and it's not supposed to be their instructor in the academy, correct?

Brian N.: Well, think about it. When you're working with somebody in an academy or FTO setting, that's an evaluative setting. That is a supervisory/subordinate role. The mentoring role is true peer support. We'll talk about peer support being different from mentoring, but peer support really is a misnomer. You are supporting peers, but the true developmental style peer support is a mentoring program.

You're not evaluating that individual. You're not sitting in judgment of them. You are helping them. The nice thing about a successful mentoring program is then you can create niche programs, like housed within our mentoring program is a group of mentors who have a military background. So, they're able to connect with our officers who were deployed, connect with their families—they have their own Facebook page.

John B.: Exactly. It's a common thread, isn't it?

Brian N.: Right. They can connect with new hires who have the military background. And so, it really helps us to overcome a lot of the obstacles that individuals are going to face early in their career. And we surveyed our agency—we went outside our agency and surveyed. And the majority of officers say that, "I wish I would have had a mentor when I was first hired," or "I would like to be a mentor." So, it's a very positive program.

John B.: Yeah, I think it is. And that leads us right into the next block of the conversation is—that's how you develop that early intervention system, correct?

Brian N.: It is. Because the first line of defense is going to be that mentee going to that mentor and saying, "Look, I'm struggling here." And that mentor either helping them over that speed bump or saying, "Well, look, we've got some great resources." Now, they've already been introduced to the resources in the training academy. Their families have been introduced to the resources.

We did abundance of developing family partnerships during the training academy, developing partnerships between the agency and the officer. But still, you have that reinforcement from that mentor—that "No, these kinds of things happen. I know they happen to me." Even if it's something as simple as not being able to navigate the streets, geography, while you're in the FTO Program. And you're thinking it's the end of the world, and your mentor says, "No, no, I had the same trouble. Hey, here's something we can do. We'll help you improve that."

John B.: Everybody does, and it all helps.

And again, that early intervention, that peer-to-peer support, which I think is paramount as well, and that ability to get officers to voluntarily ask for help or to voluntarily raised their hand. We know the term they use, again—smash the stigma. But to have faith and confidence in the agency to raise their hand and say, "I might need some help." Right?

Brian N.: Well, agencies ask me, "How will we know when we've been successful?" And I say, "You'll know when you've changed the culture."

John B.: Yeah.

Brian N.: Because, John, we are salmon in law enforcement swimming against the stream and trying to change this hundred-year culture, like you and I have talked about. But what happened in Indianapolis was exactly that. And I tell people the story that when the attorney general was sent by the White House to Indianapolis in the spring of 2016, how I measured success was the attorney general wanted to talk to some officers that we had worked with,

and I asked about ten officers, "Would you be willing to meet with the attorney general? Would you and your families be willing to meet with the attorney general?" Because what we experience in our career is a challenge to the individual and their family. And all ten officers said, "Absolutely, we'll talk to the attorney general." Well, then a week later the attorney general's office told me, "We probably should have told you this, but news media will be there. So, we can't guarantee anybody's anonymity."

So, I went back to those ten officers and their families, and I said, "Look, I can't guarantee that your name and your story won't be broadcast all over the world. So, if you want to back out, back out." And John, to their credit, all ten of them said, "No. This is important. We will be there." That's when I knew that we had changed the culture, and that was when I knew that we had created a successful program.

John B.: Well, you know I have done trainings inside Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department on many occasions, and what I've learned—everybody's done it for years, so I'm just not saying this about you, Brian, because we're friends, but before we developed our friendship, I was told by the people within the agency what a good job the agency does in taking care of them as people.

They happened to be law enforcement officers. They keep that people concept going, that there's more to being a cop than just being a cop. It's more than just a badge. It's more than just a gun. There's so much involved in this, and you realize that. And you've done the footwork, the homework. And there must have been ups and downs along the way, pluses and minuses, but to come up with a system designed to basically give officers an option other than the, as you say, one hundred years of "Suck it up, rub dirt on it, tape a Band-Aid on it, or drown it in alcohol," right?

And that was the way that it was. And I've heard it, and that's great. The other thing with the early intervention that I want to say—sometimes early intervention does involve a supervisory referral, correct? And we have to kick it up a little bit. Still, that's not a bad thing though, is it?

Brian N.: No, but the key is to educate your front-line supervisors, too. Because, John, here's the funny thing—the resources, whether you recognize the red flags and get to them early before you have to discipline them or terminate them, the resources are the same as if you tried to approach that problem after they're already in crisis or they've been disciplined by the agency.

So, why would you not see the value in early intervention and utilizing those resources to the benefit of that individual and the agency? Like I said earlier, who wins when we have an officer that fails and has to be disciplined or has to be terminated? And it goes beyond that, John, too. Let's look at officers who are involved in shootings. Look at how we historically have treated officers who have been involved in shootings. We treat them like they've done something wrong.

John B.: Automatically. "You pulled the trigger, oh my god."

Brian N.: We put them behind a piece of bulletproof glass and make them answer phones and—

John B.: Take their weapon.

Brian N.: Take weapons and we make them do reports on guns. We treat them like they've done something wrong, when the uber majority of law enforcement shootings are ruled justifiable. But we have people who do what? They say, "That's it. I'm done with this career." Or their families say, "I'm not going through that again." And so, again, this proactivity, this resilience or wellness or development—and we can address the entire gamut of what you might experience during your career and prepare you for it. Because I will tell you that the officer that is healthy that experiences a critical incident will come out that other side in most cases healthy. The officer who is unhealthy or experiencing crisis will come out of that traumatic or critical experience unhealthy and having to—

John B.: Long road to recovery. Yep. It's interesting too, because I know that in Indianapolis, you also used that professional development unit that you have in corrective-based discipline. Which I thought was very interesting, too.

Brian N.: Yes. And again, it goes back to the education process. Think of the Titanic hitting the iceberg. Well, science tells us that you only see a 25 percent or maybe 1/3 of the iceberg is above the water's surface. And so, when we use corrective-based discipline to address an issue, you have to understand what the underlying issues are. And let's take a simple example: you have an officer that misses a weapon on an arrested subject, and they send them down to the local county jail. And of course, everybody's up in arms because a weapon got in.

John B.: Everybody's having a heart attack. Yep.

Brian N.: Most agencies would pull that officer aside and they would start the ball rolling on discipline. And part of that discipline might be education-based discipline. They might send them back to the training academy for eight-hour instruction on weapon searches. And this may be a far-fetched example, but let's say that officer—

John B.: I know where you're going, so go head. I understand.

Brian N.: Yeah, that officer wasn't focused on that particular shift because two hours before they started getting ready for their shift, they found out their kid had inoperable cancer. So, who would be focused at work? And so, you do eight hours of education on prisoner searchers. So, what have you really accomplished? So, the key is to understand the big picture here. You have to deal with the whole person. If this person is in the middle of a divorce, a family situation, health-related situation, spiritual crisis—anything you can come up with, they're not going to be focused at work.

And you can use all the education in the world to resolve that. But if we're only focusing on the end result, which is what we punished them for, then we're probably missing that bigger part of the iceberg. So, again, you have to look at the whole person. And that

education component—that area where we're trying to attach some type of remediation, that's the piece, that's the proactive piece. That's the piece that's the corrective part of their transgression. Okay, how do we fix it now? How do we get them whole again?

John B.: And so, these are things that you came up with. And it's very robust because you're talking about that whole professional development piece, that resiliency factor. Training and educating people in the concept of resiliency and how to develop coping mechanisms, how to do what they can do to avoid that slippery slope, then you test that mentoring program, which I just think is fantastic. That's really well done. And on top of that, you have a layer of early intervention with that peer support that having officers who voluntarily ask for help.

You make the early intervention part of the supervisory referral process, but in more of a positive light than a negative light. Then you take, on top of that—you have a third layer, Brian, where you're basically saying that not all discipline has to be negative. There can be corrective-based discipline or disciplinary remediation, where we can step in again. So, we're taking all this effort, trying to put all this package together to avoid recurring problems, avoid losing that officer to a multitude of different reasons. So, at the end of the day, all of that is what your program's about, correct?

Brian N.: John, the great organizational psychologist Abraham Maslow said, "If the only tool in our toolbox is a hammer, we're going to see every problem as a nail."

Let's put more tools in our toolbox. And, like I said, somebody may end up needing to be disciplined.

John B.: Yes.

Brian N.: Somebody may end up needing to be terminated. I'm not taking those tools out of anybody's tool box. But let's approach things—

John B.: You cut to the chase. Because we had this conversation, Brian. We said, and I've met officers that are like, "Yeah. If I get jammed up, I just raise the flag and say 'I got a wellness problem.' 'I have an emotional problem.'" And we've talked about that. And that's a no with you, right? That's not what this is about, correct?

Brian N.: No. Because one word you're always going to hear from me, in addition to judging the merits of changing the culture is this idea of accountability. I've always maintained that the program needs to be a supportive program. But there also needs to be an element of accountability.

John B.: Because everybody's on the bus.

Brian N.: You can't keep working with him for 30 years. So, there has to be accountability. Because, John, you have worked with people who are struggling. I have worked with people that are struggling. If the individual doesn't invest in themselves, you, John Bouthillette, me, Brian Nanavaty—we can't get people healthy. We can only help them get healthy.

We can only hold their hand and walk this path way with them. We can't do the work for them. If they don't do the homework, then they're not going to get healthy. So, there has to be an accountability. So, we made sure during the course of our program that we were going to provide every resource we could, but ultimately, it was up to that individual to get themselves healthy with our help. And so, accountability is huge.

John B.: When we first met, Brian, I was still in the world of, "Hey listen—just a weak cop, okay? It's a bad cop. There's no other answer to it. And I'm not going to give them an out." And in the beginning, I was just as much a naysayer as anybody else. Until you start breaking down and thinking about this from a logical standpoint, this makes sense. We spend too much time on deviance and dysfunction than we do on wellness. And you've proven that this works, and that with the effort that you've done and the structure that you've built, this reduces a lot of the problems you experience not only as an executive of an agency, but the officer themselves, correct?

Brian N.: No question, John. Answer me this question, because you've met a lot of officers during the course of your career. I have, too.

John B.: Yes.

Brian N.: Have you ever met an officer who went into their applicant interview and said, "I don't know why I'm here. I don't want to be here. I don't want to help people. This is not the job I want to do."

John B.: Yes.

Brian N.: No. We all come in and we say all the right things. "We're caring people, we want to make a difference." So, when you get five years, 10 years, 15 years into your career, and you have that employee—usually, if you're willing to take the time, you can trace their history back to that point where they went off the rails.

Now, that may be their responsibility. It may be the result of something they experienced. It may have been something that happened at the agency. But you have to take a step back and say, "Okay. Can we get them back to that time? Get them back on the tracks and get them moving forward in a positive fashion?" Because, again, what's your alternative? I mean, your alternative is to get rid of people—

John B.: Start all over again.

Brian N.: Nobody's dancing in the hallway when we're terminating people. You may wipe your brow and say, "Glad that one's done." But nobody's celebrating the fact that we lost somebody. And it's an indictment of our hiring process on the one hand, too. Because if we do such a good job of vetting people and weeding out the people that can't be successful in this career, then why are we losing so many people?

John B.: Yeah. It doesn't make any sense.

Brian N.: No.

John B.: And it's interesting too, because I know the one thing that got me when we first started talking about this, Brian, and you stopped me. We were having a good discussion. It was someplace in Massachusetts, I believe. And we were talking about what you were doing there, and you stopped me and said, "Wait a minute, John. Let me tell you something. I don't drag people into my program. I don't drag anybody along this process kicking and screaming. I walk with them." And you said that just before. And I think that's a big piece is that there is an accountability. And I love that concept. But the fact is, if there's going to be accountability—you have systems in place that allows them to take the corrective action that they need to avoid becoming a problem, correct?

Brian N.: Yeah. We map that out right from the beginning, John. One of the things that we do is when we're working with somebody—I'm big on assigning journals. So, when I have an officer who's dealing with a challenge, I hand them a journal and I say, "I want you to fill this out every day, and in 30 days when you come back to see me, we're going to read through this journal because it's very helpful when you're dealing with challenges in your life."

Whether they're dietary, whether it's sleep, whether it's anxiety, depression, bad decision making—whatever it is, I want you to have a journal so that you're keeping an active daily log. Well, John, 30 days later, I'll look out the window of my office and I'll see an officer doing 30 days' worth of entries in his journal. It's almost comical that he'll be writing with his left hand spilling coffee on the journal, make it look like—

John B.: Oh my god.

Brian N.: "Here's my journal, captain. I did what you told me." And I'll say, "Look, guy. I saw you out in the car filling in 30 days' worth of entries. If you're not invested in yourself, then why should I be?"

John B.: Exactly.

Brian N.: Now, I've never let an officer fall on their face, but I have to come to a conscious decision that I'll set up a mechanism for them, but it can't be me.

John B.: Yeah.

Brian N.: So, at the point, where I'm not able to hold them accountable, they're not being proactive—

John B.: There's a different system in place for that person.

Brian N.: There is. You set up a mechanism with support people. It just can't be you. We won't get into this discussion much today, but I'm a firm believer this is an item that is debatable. People have their opinions on it. But I'm a firm believer in separation agreements, and that's one of the things that we practiced at our agency. Because if you don't have separation agreements, your two other choices are to keep that person around, and you risk them being toxic and affecting other people, or you go through the process of terminating them. And we talked about that already, that if there's a way to save somebody, then you should do whatever is necessary.

John B.: Yeah, but some days you have to draw an outline in the sand, unfortunately is what you're trying—

Brian N.: You do.

John B.: We call them—where I came from in New Jersey, we call them last chance agreements.

Brian N.: Right.

John B.: In other words, "I'm going to spell out all these things that you've done, all the stuff that we've done, and I'm going to give you that last chance to take that corrective behavior under that umbrella of accountability. It's up to you now. I've given you all I can give you and now it's up to you."

Brian N.: But the key again is accountability—not just the individual accountability, but whoever is monitoring that individual needs to make sure that they're accountable. Because it may come to where you do have to cut ties to that individual and want to make sure that you did everything in the agency's power to try to salvage that career.

John B.: It's interesting, because as we're going through this conversation, I know there's people listening right now who are trying to say, "So the end game on this is what? Why do I want to invest effort into this whole professional development and wellness program that Indianapolis did? What is the benefit to my agency if I do something like this?" Now, I know one of the quantitative things that people like to see—because we know there's qualitative and quantitative. But the quantitative thing, your disciplinary referrals—what happened to those when you first got this thing rolling?

Brian N.: Yeah. So, what would happen was, an officer would go in front of the disciplinary review board. And we brought all supervisors in, and we trained them on how to do a proper discipline. And a proper discipline being a discipline that is not only punitive but corrective, with a focus on the corrective part. The corrective part became a remediation plan. So, if you sent in a disciplinary referral without a remediation plan, it was sent back to you. So, every discipline had to have a corrective plan. So, when that individual appeared for their hearing, the plan was already in place.

And so that individual would, once the chief reviewed that plan—and I'm making this sound more simple than it really is, but then that individual was referred to my office. Their packet was sent to me. So, I had a history of that particular transgression, a history of previous transgressions. And then that person was required to work with me. So, you had people that were mandatories. We called them mandatories because they didn't have any choice. They were going to work with us, part and parcel to their discipline.

And then—you talked about it earlier, you had people who were voluntary entries. People who just contacted me and said, "Hey,

heard about your program." Or, "I talked to Officer Jones who said you helped him or her." And then you had your supervisory referrals, which were the early intervention referrals, before discipline was going to take place. Again, some accountability needed to take place. Some support needed to take place, but we weren't at that point where this individual needed to be disciplined yet. And that's how we were able to reduce that through that education process and that understanding of discipline. Because, John, you and I have done disciplines in our career.

John B.: Yes.

Brian N.: They're time consuming. So, if you can accomplish the same thing without having to discipline, then that's another tool you've added to your toolbox—again, the caveat being there's a time and a place to discipline. And I'm not taking that tool out of their toolbox.

John B.: No. But also, what you're saying here too, Brian, and I've seen the numbers—you had a significant drop in disciplinary referrals in your agency once this thing started to grow, correct?

Brian N.: Right, because what we were doing was we were eliminating future disciplines by putting somebody through the accountability process, putting them through the program. You weren't seeing them disciplined again, or you weren't seeing them return. The recidivism rate dropped. But then also, once we had that mechanism in place where there were resources, support system, the mentoring program, the development programs—you were seeing people doing early intervention practice, and early intervention supervisors identifying people early. And, John, if you're a supervisor and you have a problem officer and you have a program that has available resources and you contact that program, and lo and behold, six months later you're able to have an officer come back and they're healthy, you're going to say, "Wow, that really worked with Jones. I'm going to try it with Smith this time." And then that's how we developed those relationships with supervisors. That's how we got those phone calls.

John B.: Everybody's on the bus.

Brian N.: They are.

John B.: It's interesting too, because we used to look at that—I think the number I saw in the beginning was you saw a 40 percent drop in disciplinary referrals. And now, let me put my proverbial chief's hat on again—to me, that's fantastic. I don't care where you work, that is substantial. And not only inside the building where we all work, where we call home for most of our life. That has repercussions outside the agency as well, doesn't it?

Brian N.: Well, I'm sure your community will be much happier to have officers who are healthy, who respond to calls with an improved behavior, or a better attitude—

John B.: Positive, good community contacts—they're building trust, all those things. So, when people say to me, "What's worth the effort?" Well, number one, first and foremost, just saving one officer from having to go through any type of emotional crisis or, God forbid, to get to the level of hopelessness, to me, that's a win. We've discussed this several thousand times, saving the one. But we have a chance to save many. And it just takes that initial effort doesn't it, Brian? It just takes that first step forward.

And there's enough information out there right now that you've done the heavy lift, and a lot of other agencies out there, I will say as well, have done the heavy lift. A lot of the federal programs, the Community Oriented Policing Services, and the Bureau of Justice Assistance have all stepped forward to assist everybody in developing these programs. So, to me, it's just—why wouldn't you be involved in this? And I don't care what size agency you have. The question now is why aren't you vs. why should you, correct?

Brian N.: Yes. Because like I said, in 2010, there wasn't a lot of information out there. I had to invent the wheel. Agencies now don't have to invent the wheel. I'm not saying it's going to be easy, but it allows you to draw on the knowledge of others who have been there and done that, like in Indianapolis.

John B.: Don't reinvent the wheel, go borrow yours. Get on the bus, right? We have to do something different. We have to have that paradigm shift in law enforcement. And again, I hate to say this, Brian, but about a month and a half ago, I was at agency who will remain nameless, and I actually had a major there tell me basically that he believed the spike in officer suicide was the fact they were hiring the wrong people and that we were hiring weak cops. So, that culture is still out there, my friend. It's still out there.

And you and I battle that dragon every day. And I'm glad you're part of the team, Brian, out there doing all that you're doing to make that difference in the lives of the 900,000 plus law enforcement officers that are out there putting their lives on the line for every single one of us—even more now that we're both retired—every single day. And I appreciate all that you've done and continue to do in the area of professional development and officer wellness. I thank you on behalf of the entire law enforcement community for that.

Brian N.: Well, thank you, John.

John B.: And listen, Brian, to end this now, it was a pleasure. I know you're a very busy person. There will be more podcasts for our listeners with Captain Nanavaty down the road on this topic of wellness. I think it's that important. I think we all have to pay attention, and the lessons learns from the IMPD is just amazing. And we'll continue to talk about how to make this happen.

Brian N.: Thank you, John.

John B.: And for our listeners out there, if you want to get more information about what Indianapolis has done or you want to speak with Brian Nanavaty directly, please let us know. Give us an email on our website, and we can probably, hopefully make that happen for you. And I know Brian is already committed to do that as well. So, Brian is a resource in our toolbox, and he's there for you to use to help institutionally create that culture of wellness in your agency. I would also like to encourage our listeners to visit the SAFLEO website. That's S-A-F-L-E-O website at www.safleo.org, for more

information about not only this topic, but other officer safety and wellness topics. Again, thank you to our listeners, thank you Brian, and please be well, and stay safe out there.

Speaker 1: The SAFLEO Program is dedicated to providing training, technical assistance, and resources to law enforcement agencies, staff, and families to raise awareness, smash the stigma, and reduce and prevent law enforcement suicide. For additional information regarding the SAFLEO Program, please visit safleo.org, that's S.A.F.L.E.O.org. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

The Bureau of Justice Assistance, BJA, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, is committed to making our nation's communities safer through resources, developing programs, and providing grant-funding opportunities to support state, local, and tribal criminal justice efforts. All are available at no cost. Please visit www.bja.gov to learn more.