How to Survive 25 Years in the Fire Service

A guide to building new hire resiliency
Learning Objectives

▪ The need for pro-active resiliency programs to help prevent first responder suicide as well as other mental/behavioral health problems.

▪ The definition of a “critical incident” and the likelihood of facing such calls.

▪ Various coping mechanisms that can help first responders deal with the stressors that they face.
Why do we need to be pro-active?

- Seventy percent of the general population at some point will experience a traumatic event. Of that seventy percent, twenty percent will develop PTSD. (ptsdunited.org/ptsd-statistics-2)

- Our job is to mitigate traumatic events.

- FF Suicide has become an epidemic in the Fire Service.
How do we protect ourselves?
What is the result if we don’t?

Training

Decision Making and PPE
What happens when we don’t protect ourselves mentally?

- We can only fit so much into our “cup”.
- Our “cups” may come pre-filled.
What defines a critical incident?

We won’t run many “critical incidents”

WRONG!!

Any event that overwhelms our normal coping capacity is a critical incident.

Mitchell, J. T., & Everly, G. S.
“Terrible Ten” Critical Incidents

- Line of Duty Death
- Suicide of a Colleague
- Serious Work Related Injury (to Self or Colleague)
- MCI / Disaster / Terrorism Incidents
- Events with High Degree of Threat to Ourselves
- Events Involving Death or Injury to a Child
- Events in which Victim is Known
- Events with Excessive Media Interest
- Prolonged Events with a Negative Outcome
- Any Significantly Powerful, Overwhelming Distressing Event
Are there affects from the hundreds of non-critical calls we will respond to?

- Substance Abuse
- Strained Relationships
- Depression
- Anxiety
- PTSD
- Suicide
Do bad stress and Critical Incidents only affect us?

Negative coping mechanisms isolate us from family, friends and coworkers, causing strained relationships.
How can we survive 25 years?
Maintain work/life balance

- Spouse
- Children
- Household
- Finances
- Social (outside of the firehouse!)
- Physical
- Recreational
- Spiritual
- Other