

# The Resilient Minds on the Frontlines Initiative

## Voiceover

00:00

Welcome to *The Beat*—a podcast series from the COPS Office at the Department of Justice. Featuring interviews with experts from a varied field of disciplines, *The Beat* provides law enforcement with the latest developments and trending topics in community policing.

## Jennifer Donelan

00:16

Hi, I'm Jennifer Donelan, and welcome to *The Beat*. I'm your host. Today, we have a very special program involving four people. That's right, four people. We've not had that many people on a program, but this was so important. It's such a timely topic. We are hosting this call, it's an audio call via Zoom, and we're really excited to have this knowledge and this presentation for you because it couldn't be more timely. We are speaking about Resilient Minds on the Frontlines Initiative. It's a program that provides tools, knowledge, skills, and instruction that helps those on the frontlines help themselves and others in times of need. Our guests today are Michael Pellegrino, Joe Collins, Bill Mazur, and Rob Czepiel, a very esteemed group. Gentlemen, welcome to *The Beat*.

## Michael Pellegrino, Founder of Resilient Minds on the Frontlines

01:03

Thank you very much.

## Jennifer Donelan

01:05

Actually, Michael Pellegrino, I am going to be beginning with you. First of all, I always like to tell folks with whom they're speaking. So, can you tell us a little bit about your law enforcement experience before we dive into the program, Resilient Minds on the Frontlines?

## Pellegrino

01:20

Thank you, Jennifer, and first, thank you for having us on today. It's a pleasure to be on with you. Yes, I was a police officer. I came on at 18 years old—just turned 19, just at the end there, the beginning of my 19th birthday—and I was able to retire 25 years later at age 45 and start a whole second career here now. And more importantly, as a police officer I started in Road Patrol, and then I went to the Detective Bureau, and then I went into the schools as a School Resource Officer, and I ended my career in what we called the Community Response Unit. So I handled all quality of life issues and so forth, which was great. I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time with our community, and building them bridges between police and our citizens out in [inaudible 00:02:10].

## **Donelan**

*02:10*

Well, let's start off with you before I move on to the other three gentlemen. Really quick, what is resiliency, and how can it help?

## **Pellegrino**

*02:18*

Resiliency is learned. But the best way that I can describe it is bending, but not breaking. So, it's almost like if you're looking at a storm, if you're in a storm, and you see the tree bending, but not breaking—that's resiliency, and resiliency is bringing that back together. So really, truly, being a resilient person is somebody who really takes control of that situation.

## **Donelan**

*02:43*

How did you learn to be resilient prior to... like, while you were in the field? Was that a skill you learned? Were you kind of doing, going about, sort of subconsciously? Or is it a tactic that you had to learn in order to deal with things as they were presenting themselves?

## **Pellegrino**

*02:57*

Well, you encounter situations, you encounter adverse situations, not only here in life, in everything. So really and truly, I wish we had this program when I was a younger officer, middle-aged officer, and even, you know, towards the end when I start to really understand resiliency. It really helped me to get through to the other side, because, you know, obviously, positivity and a mindset... Life is a mindset, when you think about it. It's all about your innermost thoughts and being able to control them and being able to pull the weeds from your mind because thought is really what controls our whole life.

## **Donelan**

*03:39*

And there is, you know, different forms of resiliency, right? There's the mental resiliency, there's physical resiliency, there's emotional resiliency. I want to just move real quickly and introduce some of our other panel members here. That's going to include Joe Collins. Tell the audience a little bit about yourself.

## **Joseph Collins, Public Safety Liaison, Chief of Police (ret.)**

*03:56*

Hi. Thanks, Jennifer. Yes, my name is Joe Collins. I retired after nearly 35 years in law enforcement, 21 of those years as a police chief. I live just outside of Green Bay, Wisconsin right now, and after retirement, I took a role with Acadia Healthcare as a Strategic Account Manager, as a Public Safety Liaison. So, every day now, 24 hours a day, I work at helping public safety, first responders, so their organizations and their families get help in the behavioral health world.

## **Donelan**

04:24

What does resiliency mean to you?

## **Collins**

04:25

Well, resiliency is like what Mike said. I'm going to explain it similar to being a ball versus an egg, and we're going to call the adversity—or the event—the ground, and we want to bounce. We want to bounce when we hit different situations rather than break, and it's very similar to the analogy that Michael used with the tree being able to withstand the wind and be stronger as a result of the wind.

There was a science experiment outside of Tucson, the Bio-Zone, or the Bio-Dome. I don't know if you remember that or not, but that's where they encapsulated some people into this environment, and they grew everything there, and it failed, and all of the trees tipped over. And what happened is that they found that there were no roots in the trees because they've never had to withstand wind, and they did not grow stronger as a result of having adversity, and that's what the whole understanding is underneath resiliency—to create an environment and a personality that can withstand the storm.

## **Donelan**

05:22

And as of this recording, and we are recording in the beginning of June of 2020, this entire nation has been faced with the COVID-19 pandemic—our first responders, our frontline that has included law enforcement, nurses, grocery-store workers, you name it, now, particularly law enforcement, the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, every agency, every area, every corner of America has been dealing with protests on the heels of that, so a lot of issues out there that law enforcement are having to face right now. Let me introduce our next panelist, Bill Mazur. Can you tell the audience a little bit about yourself?

## **William Mazur, Public Safety Liaison, Deputy Chief of Police (ret.)**

06:00

Hi, Jennifer, and thank you for the invitation to speak on this important topic. Again, my name is Bill Mazur. I'm a 25-year law enforcement veteran. I retired as Deputy Chief of Police of my agency in southern New Jersey. Atlantic City is actually my organization, about 55, 60 miles east of Philadelphia, pretty large, a very busy sort of urban environment to work in. But before I was a police officer, I grew up in a blue family, so to speak. My father did 40 years as a police officer, and one of my brothers was also a police officer, and the rest of my family—I'm the youngest of six kids—all of us were involved in public service in some way, shape, or form. So, it's sort of in my blood, and that's sort of, you know, a bit of my background.

Once I left law enforcement in 2017, after 25 years, I joined Acadia Healthcare as a Public Safety Liaison as well, and Joe and I are counterparts, so to speak. We help police officers, first responders and their family members, both retired and active, to be connected to resources for mental health issues or substance-use issues.

## **Donelan**

06:57

Resiliency. I love the examples that we've heard thus far: the tree bending, not breaking; the bouncing ball. Is it as simple as, you know, you got to look at this as glass half full versus glass half empty, and giving people the tools in order to do that, to be able to remain positive in the face of adversity? Or am I oversimplifying that?

## **Mazur**

07:21

Well, you know, I think of the old adage: Sometimes things are easier said than done. There is a process to becoming resilient. The good news is that most humans are inherently resilient, and they do bounce back, but we're talking about an enhanced level of bouncing back, and those are great examples that they both... those visual examples of the tree and the ball, or the egg. Essentially, the clinical explanation is—the generalized, accepted explanation or definition is—adaptation to adversity, and that is something that transcends law enforcement.

I mean, it applies to everything in our lives, but there definitely is... it's not necessarily—in my eyes, and I think that there's a lot of evidence to support this—it's not just something that you can turn on, right? There is a process to developing resilience, and there are a lot of components that I'm sure we're going to discuss, but I think some of the most important things in developing resilience is, developing a growth mindset, having an open mind. Research shows that generally people who have an open mind, who are open to new concepts, they are people who can grow in the face of adversity, and that essentially is resilience.

## **Donelan**

08:26

Thank you. Rob Czepiel, before we began this taping, I said, "So what did you do?" And your answer was, "I'm still doing." So tell the audience about that.

## **SDAG Robert H. Czepiel, Jr., Deputy Director, Assistant Attorney General, State of New Jersey Chief Resiliency Officer**

08:36

Yeah, I'm still doing it. My name is Rob Czepiel. I am a Deputy Attorney General with the Division of Criminal Justice for the Office of the Attorney General in the state of New Jersey. I am a Deputy Director. I have been a career prosecutor for 24 years and I am the Chief Resiliency Officer for the state of New Jersey.

## **Donelan**

08:52

Thank you. On the topic of resiliency, and then we're going to get into the brass tacks about what this initiative and what the program is, because it's one thing to talk about being resilient, but this program

is really designed to give you the tools to become resilient. So Rob, just in keeping with the... what does resiliency mean to you? I want to ask you, because I think at this point, when I first looked at it, I said, well, you either are or you aren't resilient, right?

And when you're talking about these types of professions, especially like law enforcement or first responders, this is the job I signed up to do. I can handle this. You know, I'm mentally capable. Like, this is what part of the job is, right? It seems like as we've moved through time, we've become much more open to our vulnerabilities, our humanness, right, and really being proactive in saying, "You know what? No, you might need some tools. We're not going to assume that you can handle all of this. We're going to give you news you can use," so to say. But what does resiliency mean to you?

## **Czepiel**

*09:49*

You pretty much encapsulated what resiliency means to me in that little discussion that you had there. Resiliency, for me, is, you know, my grandmother, my grandfather, my parents, and what I was taught when I was a kid. It's the coach that, you know, told me to actually do 50 more ground balls, and what... I learned resiliency on a football field, and then you kind of forget it, because life happens, and especially for cops and prosecutors as well, you see things that humans are not designed to see, and you really forget. And all of a sudden you isolate, and all of a sudden you don't actually communicate and you don't talk about things, and you forget those resiliency skills. Resiliency, for me, is actually the three gentlemen that walk the beat, that I have the pleasure of actually being on this podcast with, and on the other side of 25, 24, 26 years, are actually giving back to the profession they love. That's what resiliency is for me.

## **Donelan**

*10:43*

Thank you, Rob. Let's move back to Michael. We've talked about resiliency. I think people know what it is. Can you teach resiliency? Is that what your program does?

## **Pellegrino**

*10:52*

Absolutely. I believe in it wholeheartedly and I think Bill hit the nail on the head. It's having that growth mindset. It's having the ability to change. It's having the ability to bounce back, and it's something that you put on your tool belt, and we put on our tools to go to work, our tools in life, and we use resiliency on our tool belt to make sure that, no matter what the situation, no matter what we have endured in our lives, we're able to use whatever we've learned in the resiliency program and apply it to our lives. It's kind of like Superman, he always had the right tool at the right time to solve the issue or whatever it was, and that's what resiliency is, to me anyway. It's having that right tool, whether it's the ABCs or whether it's counting my blessings. Whatever it is, I always go back to what my thought is or what my core value is to make sure that I grab that and become resilient in that moment.

## Donelan

11:52

How do you teach that to somebody? Is it just a, "Hey, think about the positive. Look at this as a..." You know, I watched your video and one of the things that stood out for me was looking at something that's coming at you and instead of being negative about it and planning for, "Oh gosh, this is going to be bad," say to yourself, "This is a challenge," and, you know, get excited about it instead of negative about it. Excited might be too strong of a word, but you know what I mean. Can you go into some detail there?

## Pellegrino

12:20

Well, it's even in business, it's in life, it's whatever. Life is going to throw you curve balls and especially in business, and I look at it from this point of view, is the adversity. You know, everything that you have to overcome, everything that you have to do—if it was kind of easy, if it was easy, everybody would do it. So, really and truly, life will get you what you can handle, and it's what the grit... it's reaching down into your, you know, into your passion, into your body, and understanding that moving forward is the only option. And we get so caught up in daily stressors, and I look at it from any point and I can say, there's nothing that we can't get through together, not by talking it out, not by being able to teach it, not even being able to live it. I live it every day, and that's where it really has infiltrated my life, and I'm able to use that same passion to go out in and teach that as well. So it comes from within. I really do believe that.

## Donelan

13:21

To Joe Collins, our retired chief. Okay, let me give you a police department with 1,500 sworn members, and task you with teaching them resiliency. What does that look like? Is that a daily message? Is that a class? Is that emails? Is it webinars? What is that? What does that look like?

## Collins

13:40

Yes, it's all of the things that you just said and more, because... You know, I met with the Houston Peer Support Team a couple of weeks ago and I did a short presentation, it was about 10 minutes, and they were so enamored with the information about what I was presenting to them, they asked whether or not we could come and we could help them learn this and teach this. And they're like, "How long would this take?" And I said, "Well, I can do it in 10 minutes or it's an entire lifetime," because resiliency is not an end game. You don't get to a finish line in resiliency. You develop resiliency. It's like a muscle, and that the best example that we can use is that you need to continuously work your muscle of resiliency to make it stronger, and make it so that it applies to the different situations that you're going to encounter. So, yes to everything that you said, and more.

What it's going to take is, it's going to take a team of people that believe resiliency can make a difference, and one of the great quotes of all time that we use in our training is from Viktor Frankl in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. The quote is exactly this, it's, "Between stimulus and response there is

a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." Now, those words are so relevant today with what's going on right now, is that we need our organizations, we need our people in those organizations, to respond appropriately. And you can only respond appropriately if you are in control of what's going on inside your body, and inside your mind, and that comes from resiliency. You've got to be able to take control of your thoughts so that they don't take control of you.

## **Donelan**

15:24

Great example. I like where we're going. Bill, the power to control, asking yourself the question, "what can I control here?" Let's just give an example. I'm a police chief, one of my officers has been engaged in a use of force, the video is out in the public, and I am now dealt with having to respond to this. It's in the first moments of this news breaking. What do you say to that police chief? What are the things that that police chief can control?

## **Mazur**

15:51

Sure. Well, I think they can control the narrative, not to jump to conclusions, always facts before acts. I think there's two things that you have to look at in a classic use of force. That example that you gave me, I've dealt with that many times. I think you have to look at the actual event, what occurred, and then you need to layer the context on it. Why did it occur? What happened before it? What brought the officer there, and then dive deeper into, there's a lot of peripherals, you know. What kind of training, but also, where is the officer at in life? Is the use of force, or maybe an excessive use of force, or an inappropriate use of force, is it a symptom of something deeper in the officer?

Are they dealing with some anxiety, some depression, some post-traumatic stress? Is there family dynamics at home that are causing, you know, layers of issues that are manifesting itself in an anger response? So, I think what we're saying is—and Joe and I talk about this all the time—is resilience really is self-awareness and self-management, the intersection of that. And that manifests itself in coping skills, and when officers aren't familiar with why they're feeling things, often maladaptive coping skills occur, whether that's an inappropriate use of force, or it's drinking and self-medicating, some family issue, right? So, these are the things that we really look at: self-awareness, self-management, and resilience as coping skills.

## **Donelan**

17:13

Let me ask you this. I mean, let's look at the chief himself, though, or herself, in terms of—and any one of you can jump in here—but Rob, I'll ask you this first. To that leader, to the officer who's a member of that agency, the things that I'm thinking about as you guys are talking, you know, the things that can control how I personally react to this, I can calm down because I can only control the things that I can control. So, I'm going to control those things and manage those things well. That, to me, you know, if we're going to be honest, right, there's a moment of panic when that stuff happens.

There's a moment of pure dread. There's a moment of anxiety. People are human. The action wasn't committed by you, but you are the person that has to deal with it. You are the person that has to manage your department through a storm, manage your family through the storm, manage your community, et cetera. So, is that resiliency, and what do you teach? What do you tell those people to focus on as they manage their way through that storm, so that they bend and don't break?

## **Mazur**

*18:09*

That's a really complex question for a leader. I can tell you in the context of another call that no one wants to get, and that's an officer suicide. I've had, unfortunately, as the Chief Resiliency Officer, phone calls that I've had with chiefs that, unfortunately, one of their own have committed suicide, and they have all of those emotions swirling around them. And they are in charge of the department, and they have to keep it together, and they have to worry about press, and they have to worry about the family, the officer's family, and they have to worry about all these things, and they forget about themselves, and so their taking care of themselves becomes extremely important as well.

Them actually making sure that they are not completely drained with the events that are happening, that they can, with a clear mind, be able to handle the pressures that they're dealing with, and they are still human, and the officers are human, and so are the sergeants, the lieutenants. Everyone is human in this scenario. We're not robots. We're not computers. And actually, the resiliency program that we teach in New Jersey and the New Jersey Resiliency Program is designed to do just that, and I know Bill's going to get into, and Joe is going to get into different aspects of it, but it's designed specifically for a relief valve—an escape valve for the line guy, for the officers that are doing car stops, for the leaders that have the entire department plus their own family to deal with. It is designed specifically to give a different way of thinking and I am not kidding when I tell you it's life changing.

## **Donelan**

*19:42*

Okay, let's get into it, because I think that we have a real opportunity here to reach law enforcement across the country, and now more than ever, they need these tools. So, let's give them the bird's-eye view. What does this mean, pre-event, you know, pre-bad thing happening, post-bad thing happening, maintaining it? Who wants to start?

## **Collins**

*20:01*

I'll take on the pre-event. I just want to build a little bit more on what Rob was saying. Is that, you know, our beliefs don't make us better people, it's our actions. And by having these skills and these tools in place before the event, it's going to make the event better for us. And I'm not saying that it's not going to be adverse, it's not going to be difficult, but coming out of the event, we're going to be better people. And what does that take? That takes, like you said, there's four different areas that we try to deal with.

It's the physical, the emotional, the spiritual, and, you know, that's an important part, is that the spiritual part, is that we help people either figure out what their purpose is. We call it our PFE, our purpose for existing, it comes from a book, *The Why Café*, and it asks the question, "Why am I here?"

Why am I here? Why do I get up every day? Why do I put my feet on the ground and move forward? And if you don't have a purpose that's in your core values, then we help you find that. And what Rob was talking about before when he said it comes from his family, his grandparents, our values are so... they are created from so many different things in our lives. And I asked this question to some of the younger officers when we taught this question is, "Why are you here? What's your purpose?" And they didn't necessarily have an answer, and that's a great answer, because we can work on that, but you got to be open to actually creating what your purpose is.

Some of the other things... Michael talked about the gratitude. That's one of our lessons that we teach, gratitude and actually counting blessings, because our mind is usually a default to look at the worst possible case scenario, or the negative things that are going on around us, and it's easy for us to see those things, and sometimes it's very difficult for us to see gratitude and the people that are actually helping us in our life, unless we focus on them on purpose and actually create that. Because then we're going to create neural pathways in our brain to be able to see the gratitude and things that are going on. One of the other lessons is, it's called meaning making, and that, again, boils down to the whole concept that we talked about with Viktor Frankl, is that, why am I in this particular situation, and what can this situation teach me? Bill talked about it before, as the police chief.

You have got to be able to accept the fact that you're going to have feelings about this, and you've got to accept them, recognize them for what they are, they're thoughts, and then you can take control of your thoughts, and you can respond appropriately. And like Rob said, and Michael, it's not going to be easy. There's going to be difficult situations. We're in one right now and we could spiral down. We could go into a dark corner, and we could just sit there and not become stronger or better as an organization or as a person as a result, or we can make meaning of the situation. Viktor Frankl was in a concentration camp during World War II and he was able to make meaning out of that particular situation that made him stronger. It made others around him stronger, and it still continues to make people stronger today.

## **Donelan**

22:59

So, what's the practical application, though? These are great thoughts, but how do you institutionalize these thoughts? How do you teach people this? How do you incorporate this into your everyday? I mean, these guys come in 7:00 a.m., hit the road. Is it in service training?

## **Czepiel**

23:14

This is Rob. So, in the state of New Jersey, and I can only relate with what we're doing in New Jersey, we actually have the New Jersey Resiliency Program. All law enforcement officers in the state of New Jersey, all approximately 36,000 officers by 2022, will have taken the two-day training that we put together, with help with our friends from Acadia Healthcare and the FBI National Academy. It is a two-

day training where it's just not death by PowerPoint, but it's actually broken down into tenants, and it's broken down into actual exercises and practical exercises, and that's what really makes our program different. It's designed to strip away all of those walls that officers build up over time to actually get down to what it means to be resilient, to be able to overcome, to get in touch with their feelings.

We are changing culture in the state of New Jersey and we're doing it with one RPO, Resiliency Program Officer, interaction at a time. We're doing it with the training. So, in New Jersey, all law enforcement officers will be taking this two-day full training by 2022. In New Jersey, it starts from the top down. So, I know that a lot of individuals that hear your podcast are leaders. It has to start with the chief. It has to start with your attorney general. It has to start with your commanders, and start from the top down. In New Jersey, our attorney general and our director of Division of Criminal Justice bought in all the chiefs of police, all the local chiefs, the county chiefs, the colonel of the New Jersey State Police, all state agencies, they all bought in and they all understand that this program is designed to change a police culture, a culture of officers that basically, if there's an active shooter situation, because I know you have three law enforcement officers on the phone, they would run towards danger and not worry about themselves.

That same culture, however, is that we need to break through, and that the program is designed to break through, is those first responders, those officers actually asking for help themselves. And so that's basically how you push this out. In New Jersey, we're pushing this out. We have gotten support both from the management, so the leadership and the chiefs, and if a chief is interested in doing this, we will put the entire package together—the policy that we wrote describing the resiliency program, that's an attorney general directive in New Jersey, our training materials, everything that we have with regards to this program, how to create it, getting the unions involved is a big tell and a big action. We will give all of that to anyone that asks because we believe this is life changing. The big thing with regards to a program like this because you're changing culture, is cops and whether or not they trust the program. And so for any leader that is interested in doing this, confidentiality is going to be really, really important.

And confidentiality with regards to an officer who comes for help, who speaks to a resiliency program officer, who actually bears his soul to that officer, isn't concerned that that officer is going to turn around and then become a rat. Our program actually protects confidentiality in two separate ways. The first way is that the policy itself says that any interaction between the RPO and the officer is confidential. The second way is, we have approximately 830 resiliency program officers throughout the state of New Jersey, and those resiliency program officers, anyone can call any of those resiliency program officers in the state. We have a list. We give it to every agency in the state of New Jersey. So, if I'm in North Jersey, and I don't want to speak to my RPO for whatever reason, I have a beef with them, I can call someone from, you know, a 100, 120 miles down in South Jersey, and actually talk to them.

The last part of this, and it... there's a lot of parts involved with the creation of a program like this, is actually making sure that whatever your EAPs and your peer-to-peer groups, because most states have peer-to-peer counselors, that for those officers that were not dealing with resiliency, but they are actually now potentially suicidal or have post-traumatic stress disorder, or are self-medicating with alcohol, that, in fact, those officers have someone to call to get referred to someone with a lot of letters

after their name, that specializes in helping them. In New Jersey, we have a cop-to-cop program, so we have actually been liaised up with peer-to-peer, cop-to-cop and EAP programs for that. So, it's a multi-level program. Unlike doing it in an agency, we're actually doing it statewide, and we will offer it to anyone who wants it, because we believe it's going to save lives.

## **Donelan**

27:43

Well, we are talking pre-event, right, and I can see where you... once an event occurs, you are able... you're set up to better manage through that event. That's the point and goal of resiliency, correct me if I'm wrong, but you are more resilient, you're better able to manage through that because you have these mechanisms and skills, and tools, like your tool belt, your Superman tool belt, where you pull out whatever tool you need in order to best manage through whatever it is you're facing, the adversity, or whatever situation it is. Post-event, the bad thing has happened. How does resiliency training, after something has occurred, come into play? And I'll ask Bill this question.

## **Mazur**

28:20

Sure. So, you know, going back to the pre-event just for a moment, none of this curriculum is going to make you impervious to trauma, right? I mean, it just doesn't work that way and it's no guarantee that you won't even develop symptoms of post-traumatic stress, or even post-traumatic stress disorder. Hopefully, with the skill set, with the coping skills, you will spend less time there and be able to recover. So, bouncing back to the post-event or the post-traumatic growth commonly referred to. So, if you could have the listeners picture this, you know, if you were traveling along the road, right, and the event comes, right, the traumatic event, and you drop off, there are some individuals who will, you know, have a hard time getting out of that vortex, you know, where you're down. Which obviously can result in depression, anxiety, et cetera.

The resilience part not only gets you up to where you were, right, you bounce back, but the post-traumatic growth takes you beyond where you were before, if that makes sense to folks. If they can get that visual reference. And that can only happen through developing a growth mindset. And all of these things are addressed in the curriculum through a series of exercises, learning what gratitude means. It's not manners. People think, you know, please and thank you is gratitude. Well, I guess it kind of is, but that's not the kind of gratitude we're talking about. The ABCs are really how to not have emotional responses to events, how to recognize your triggers. That's a big one. That's a big one in coping.

But again, the post-traumatic stress that eventually develops, or we try to transform into post-traumatic growth, is that huge meaning-making piece, and the easiest way I could say this is, we try to get folks to think of it in terms of what did this person or this event, teach me? What can I learn from it? Now, it's a lot easier said than done, and it takes a lot of practice. It isn't a diet. It's a lifestyle to be able to get to a place where you can recognize why things may have happened to you and how you can adapt to them. I mean, look, everyone, everyone on this, practically on the Earth, was affected by COVID to some degree. We know everybody in the United States and much of Europe was, so everybody had to figure out a way to continue on, right?

That's what we're really talking about, meaning making. How do I figure out a new path where I can grow from this? And a lot of businesses, I mean, tons of businesses had to adjust to that, right, with, you know, online sort of opportunities or using technology. I mean, even what we're doing right now, Zoom, for an example. It was not really a big part of what we did prior to this. It was an occasional video conference, but now it's pretty much the norm. So again, I use that as a really, really basic example of growing in the face of adversity. So, that kind of encapsulates what we're talking about when we say growth. How do we figure out a new path? What did this mean to me? What can it teach me so I don't make this mistake again in the future?

## **Donelan**

31:08

Michael, I'm going to take you back up to 35,000 feet. Let's just take a look at, as of June 2020, what we're looking at across the country in dealing with the reaction to the George Floyd situation in Minneapolis. In-person meetings, you know, we're still dealing with COVID here, in-person gatherings aren't happening. Big, in-person meetings aren't happening. The need for resiliency is perhaps more serious and more needed than ever before. So, how do you get it to people? Can a department do this virtually?

## **Pellegrino**

31:37

Well, we'd like to do it in the classroom style. That's the most opportune. We want to have 20 to 25 people in a classroom because it really brings out pure emotion and interpersonal skills that the facilitators will bring out in the people in the classroom, but, you know, obviously, we had just got to March and we had just finished teaching 170 master resiliency trainers in New Jersey who were going to go out and teach, you know, the RPOs, who were going to go out and teach the law enforcement officers.

So, really and truly, we put a team together, and that team of not only professional, you know, law enforcement professionals, but doctors, nurses, attorneys, state of New Jersey, the Attorney General, and everybody kind of got together, and that's when Resilient Minds on the Frontlines was created, and that was just to bring 15 minutes of hope to a world turned upside down, and that's what we're really focused on now in trying to get that message out there. And right now, we're currently in 64 countries, and all 50 states, and New Jersey.

## **Donelan**

32:39

There are places though, that, you know, we can't gather more than 10 people in one particular location. So how are you dealing with that? Are there webinars or anything that people can use?

## **Pellegrino**

32:49

Well, you can go to [onthefrontlines.us](https://onthefrontlines.us). That's [onthefrontlines.us](https://onthefrontlines.us), and you can view our 21 webcasts. We already released in just about 71 days, we released 20. We're going to release 21 tomorrow. So, we

released 21 webcasts, and we did a trailer, kind of just overviewing everything that we do in the resiliency program, but the key is to give positivity, hope, a resiliency tool, and also resources to the people that are listeners, and that was the key to help those on the frontlines help themselves and others, and that's what we really wanted to focus on. I can't tell you enough with these three gentlemen that are on this call right now, we just put together an unbelievable team from across the country, and really tried to take it to another level and get innovative, and understand that this was more important now than ever.

## **Donelan**

33:48

And you mentioned the website [onthefrontlines.us](http://onthefrontlines.us). That's O-N-T-H-E-F-R-O-N-T-L-I-N-E-S-dot-U-S. Joe, let me leave our listeners with a real firm... because here's what I don't want to happen. I don't want people to listen to this and say, "Oh, resiliency. Yeah. Okay, that sounds great. Yes, you're right. We should do that. Yes. You know, yes, we should tell people to have these different attitudes or training exercises in their brains," but how can they actually do that? And I really want them to have an understanding of, "Oh, okay, that's what I will... I will physically, tangibly be able to take this sort of program to my troops in an effort to teach them, train them." I don't even know what the right word is there. Resiliency, build resiliency, right?

## **Collins**

34:36

Right, and that's through, like, what Rob was saying. That the two-day program that they put together is very similar. It started with the Positive Psychology Department out of University of Pennsylvania. It went to the military. The military invited us to become instructors through the FBI National Academy Association, and our teachers then brought it to New Jersey. What it really boils down to is there's three components of this. You have to learn the lessons. The third component is you teach the lessons, but the second component is that you have to embed the lessons into your life, and the lessons require work, and it's exercises during the class, and actually building your resiliency during your exercises.

## **Donelan**

35:15

And I'm sorry, Joe, I'm going to stop you because I want to give them, like, one example of an exercise as you're talking. I had a very traumatic event occur in my life, and I went to counseling after that, and one of the things that I walked away... and there's two things I actually walked away from that, that I still use to this day, and there's... one's a breathing technique, right?

## **Collins**

35:15

Mm-hmm [affirmative].

## **Donelan**

35:32

Breathe in for two, out for four, to try and calm the sympathetic nervous system, and it's a tool that I literally use whenever something happens, or I sense fear to calm myself down. That is something that makes me more resilient. Is that what you're talking about?

## **Collins**

35:48

That's one of the things. We talked... that's called box breathing. And in law enforcement, we kind of talk about that as combat breathing, where you breathe in to the count of four, hold to the count of four, push it out through your mouth to the count of four, and hold to the count of four. You do it four times, and like you said, that's activating your parasympathetic nervous system, and to talk about this, we have to talk about the sympathetic. So, the sympathetic nervous system is our fight-or-flight part of our system, and that means that all of these chemicals are being dumped into your body, cortisol, adrenaline, the things that you need to protect yourself in a fight, which is very important.

However, there comes a time that the fight is over, and you need to take control of your nervous system, and that's taking control of your parasympathetic nervous system, and you do that through breathing. It's the only thing that you can do immediately to take control of your nervous system, is deep, long breaths, filling your lungs, because the activating nerves in the bottom of your lungs are the best way to activate your parasympathetic nervous system, and then get control of your response. So, that's one simple exercise that you can do immediately to take control.

## **Donelan**

36:51

And are those some of the things that they get out of this training, those sorts of practical, like they walk out of that room with things that they can physically do, or mentally practice in order to build up their resiliency?

## **Collins**

37:02

Absolutely. We do that. We challenge them to actually make meaning out of situations in their lives, talk to other people in the training about that, and what it meant to them, and what it could have meant to them. We do that with gratitude. We have them journal gratitude, share gratitude, because we connect through stories that are similar in nature. That's how we connect as human beings, and one of the great things that we learned are two simple words, is that when somebody is telling their story, whether it's a traumatic situation, or they're struggling, we use the words "me too," because when people don't ask for help, they don't think anybody could possibly understand what they're going through.

And when you simply say, "Me too," it kind of gets their attention. It's like, "Wait a minute, you understand what I'm saying?" So, that goes to the point where the post-event, what Bill was talking about, not only will it help the individual, but when you have resiliency skills and you see someone else

on a call, or during a situation, that's struggling or spiraling down, or not reacting appropriately or responding appropriately, you see that and you can grab them. You can intervene, and you can pick them up so that they don't struggle, and they don't spiral down to the bottom.

## **Donelan**

*38:11*

Gentlemen, and just have you say who you are before you speak, but I'd like for you to give me some final thoughts on this, because now more than ever, law enforcement has to be resilient. Law enforcement is being tested. Law enforcement has a mountain to climb, whether it's public perception, whether it's rebuilding trust, whether it's maintaining trust—there's just so much ahead. You have to recruit new people to this industry, to this calling, and everybody knows that the challenges that everybody's been having across the board, so law enforcement has to be resilient. So, your final thoughts on resiliency, how important it is in building it, that it is something that you can actually build. You're not stuck where you are. You can improve, you can get stronger, you can bend a little less. You won't break. I'll start with Michael.

## **Pellegrino**

*38:54*

Yes, I always like to use and finish up with yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift. That's why we call it the present. So, it's important for me to understand, moving forward, no matter what happens, you can't control yesterday, but you can make a difference for tomorrow, and that's the biggest takeaway that I try to do every day. No matter what happened in my life yesterday, I want to make sure that I make meaning at it and understand and move forward and learn from it so that it doesn't happen tomorrow.

## **Donelan**

*39:23*

All the better for it. Joe.

## **Collins**

*39:24*

Well, and that's fantastic, Michael, and thank you for that. I'll start with a quote from Colin Powell, and his quote is, "Relentless optimism is a force multiplier." Relentless optimism is a force multiplier. That means if we go into a situation or come through a situation with a positive, or we believe that we're going to grow because of it, that will spread, and you're going to have people that are naysayers and say, "Well, I can't change the organization. Me being positive or me being optimistic about isn't going to make a difference." I will argue the fact that it will make the biggest difference in the world if it makes a difference for you as an individual, and you get control of your thoughts, you develop your resiliency, and you spread that and help others.

## **Donelan**

40:07

Thank you. Bill.

## **Mazur**

40:09

Humans generally default to the negativity bias. I mean, it's just innately in us, and it's really something that's exacerbated or enhanced with law enforcement, because there are some skills that you develop as a law enforcement officer that actually make you good at work, but don't translate very well at home. And let me give you an example of a few of those that we talk about in our curriculum. Number one is emotional detachment. It actually makes you good at work. It makes you more efficient, you know, it makes you... the efficacy of your job to be able to detach from things that you see because, let's face it, you wouldn't get through a shift, let alone a couple decades of a career.

So, emotional detachment is one of those skills at work that you must have to be able to do your job effectively. Number two skill is cynicism, and that's something that, you know, comes with sort of that dark humor that we exercise as part of a coping mechanism, and distrust as well. And cynicism and distrust often intersect because they can, at times, make you see through the lies that people tell you in the job. It could make you a good interviewer. It could make you a good investigator, but when you get home from work, and you start carrying that in and it starts bleeding over into your personal life, those things don't translate well.

So, what I'm getting at is, again, self-awareness, educating yourself, recognizing, looking inward and saying, "Hey, these are things that I have to be aware of. I know that I have to use them at work to a degree, but I have to figure out a way to turn that off, or to adjust and come out of that downward spiral, and get into an upward spiral so I can be present for my family." That alone is a huge thing for law enforcement officers specifically. I mean, we talk about first responders as a whole, but that is something that is very specific to law enforcement, and that alone can really have an impact on your life when you recognize it, know how to deal with it, and not let it bleed into your personal life.

## **Donelan**

41:55

All right, gentlemen, throughout this discussion, I've heard you talk about the ABCs. I really I think that it's a great point here for us to dig into. What are the ABCs? Bill, I'll ask you.

## **Mazur**

42:05

Yeah, it's a great question and we probably should have addressed that acronym earlier. It's a very simple formula. A stands for activating event, B is the brain's interpretation of that event, and then C are the consequences, and C, really is the part that we're looking to change through the resilience education. That is, oftentimes, the emotional response we have to an event, and ironically enough,

research says this, psychology says this, that it's not really the event that causes this emotional response, it's your interpretation. It's the feelings that you perhaps have about something, and the best example I could give you is this.

It's the most commonly occurring thing and everybody relates to it. I would venture to say that most, if not every single one of your listeners, at one point in time, have received an email that got lost in translation, and it got lost in translation either because there were some words in there that activated them, that made them default to a negative belief, or the negativity bias, and they interpret it as something really bad. Or here's another example, when your supervisor calls you and says, "Hey, can you come into my office. I need to see you." The majority of folks will think something negative.

I mean, most people are not thinking, "He probably wants to give me a raise and tell me how good of a job I'm doing," or, "She's going to tell me what a good job I'm doing." That's usually not the default mechanism and so those are the ABCs, and that's something that we really, really delve deep into, because again, that is the foundation of self-awareness. You have to understand the responses that you have, why you feel anxiety, why you feel isolation, why you feel alone sometimes, and if you aren't in touch with those feelings, you don't understand why they're happening, you'll never be able to correct them.

## **Donelan**

43:44

Thank you. Thank you for that explanation, and I think that that's huge, and I got to tell you, I have self-taught myself on the email thing because you're right. You'll read an email, your brain turns and you miss words. I have to go back and read it, and say, "Oh, I misread that because my subconscious took over and my frontal lobe shutdown." This is really necessary, and that's why I'm really excited to have you guys on. I mean, the timing couldn't be more perfect, unfortunately.

It's so valuable to be able to point people to, "Hey, there's a resource here," to really look ahead and say, "There's a way out," right? And there's a way... like you said before, it's not only being able to pick yourself up. It's making yourself even better than you were before, right? And that's what this seems to be about. So, I'm really excited for people to be able to share this. Michael, I'm going to go back to you to wrap it up. Again, just one more time for the audience, how do they find out more about your program?

## **Pellegrino**

44:33

To learn more about our program and to see our team, and to even ask us questions, please contact us at [onthefrontlines.us](https://onthefrontlines.us). That's O-N-T-H-E-F-R-O-N-T-L-I-N-E-S-dot-U-S, [onthefrontlines.us](https://onthefrontlines.us), and you can get a host of information there.

## **Donelan**

44:55

Gentlemen, thank you so much. I am delighted that we were able to have four of you, all of your wealth of experience and knowledge, and really what I think is going to be some really exciting training for the law enforcement community and first responders overall as well, Resilient Minds on the Frontlines Initiative. You have the web address there. Gentlemen, thank you so much for joining us. To our listeners, be safe out there, and thank you for listening to *The Beat*.

## **Voiceover: *The Beat* Exit**

45:20

*The Beat* is brought to you by the United States Department of Justice's COPS Office. The COPS Office helps to keep our nation's community safe by giving grants to law enforcement agencies, developing community policing publications, developing partnerships and solving problems. If you have comments or suggestions, please email our Response Center at [askcopsrc@usdoj.gov](mailto:askcopsrc@usdoj.gov), or check out our social media on Facebook, [www.facebook.com/dojcops](http://www.facebook.com/dojcops), on YouTube, [www.youtube.com/c/dojcopsoffice](http://www.youtube.com/c/dojcopsoffice), or on Twitter @copsoffice. Our website is [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).

## **Voiceover: Disclaimer**

46:17

The opinions contained herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. References to specific agencies, companies, products or services should not be considered an endorsement by the authors or the U.S. Department of Justice. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues.