

**Armor Up, Armor Down:
The Inner Life of Cops, Firefighters and Medics**
Session I: Much More Than a Job or Career

When we are no longer able to change a situation –
we are challenged to change ourselves.
-Viktor E. Frankl



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What this about and who we are

- Offer a different perspective
- Connect people who care about first responders and their lives
- Reframe first responder work as a life path
- Offer practical suggestions

Setting and approach

- Difficult times for first responder
- Our approach this
 - Experience
 - Study and research
 - Lived experience

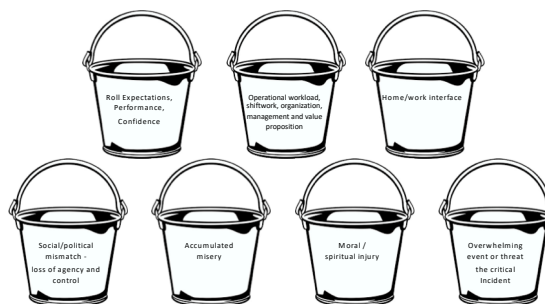
Current framing of the experience

- Incomplete**
- Society –heroes and villains
 - Psychology – risk of psychopathology
 - First responder – just a job and career

The actual experience

- Most will not break down
- The greatest stressors are not big events
- Many start the work with high hopes but settle for a job or career
- Rather than *adding* to their lives, first responder work *subtracts* from their lives
- First responders that thrive
- A balanced, positive, grounded land vibrant inner life

Stress Buckets



Some terms

- Living well, wellbeing
- Inner life
- Life path
- Spiritual life.

Those that thrive over time

- Come from all environments, departments, age groups, lifestyles, faiths
- Described their experiences in a variety of ways but share commonalities:
 - Deep respect for the role and work
 - Recognize the emotional, psychological and spiritual demands
 - Have an proactive relationship with adversity
 - Prioritize wellbeing and have a vibrant inner life path

Six areas of focus, work, learning

1. Armor up and armor down
2. Prioritize equanimity and calm
3. Create a deep friendship with the self
4. Cultivate and tend nutritious relationships with others
5. Hold, carry and transform heartbreak
6. Claim a personal and collective life narrative

Questions

- October 15: "Working on the Friendship with Yourself"
- October 22: "Rocking with Adversity"
- October 29: "Rediscovering and Cultivating Calm"

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Emotional, psychological, spiritual demands

- Willingly enter an occupation of high risk, high stress and high responsibility;
- Accept responsibility for others life, safety and health (including strangers);
- Imagine, plan and prepare for the worst;
- Suspend the natural priority of self-preservation;
- Operate calmly amid extreme stress;
- Cultivate psychological toughness;
- Override strong emotions;
- Normalize high levels of stress;
- Cultivate high levels of vigilance;

Emotional, psychological, spiritual demands

- Develop finely tuned bullshit detector and always leave it on;
- Display tolerance, kindness, concern, understanding, compassion and competence while psychologically armored up;
- Preference cognitive empathy over affective empathy;
- Accept the necessity of violence and be willing to use violence;
- Absorb and carry potentially distressing images, experiences and memories;
- Regularly confront mortality;
- Bear witness to society's ills;
- Observe, experience and participate in events that result in a sense of guilt and shame (even if there is no logical connection between the event and feeling);
- Wrestle with moral paradox;
- Be self-reliant in extreme circumstances; and
- Be subject to a society that sees the role of warrior rescuer as either heroic or the fodder for breakdown or chooses not to see at all.