

Newsletter

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Volume 6, Edition 6



Bringing the struggle to the surface

As officers went through the Boulder Crest Struggle Well training, they were able to talk with their peers about things they'd never discussed before. The training showed them how deeply buried traumas affected their family relationships, their work lives and their coping mechanisms.

Watch to learn more in Part 2.

[WATCH VIDEO.](#)



On the path to wellness

Struggle Well training helped officers reflect more deeply on the personal and work issues they face every day and taught them ways to cope with those stressors in a healthy way.

Watch to learn more in Part 3.

[WATCH VIDEO](#)



STRUGGLE WELL

An approach to mental health in law enforcement

When the Boulder Crest Foundation brought the Struggle Well pilot training program to law enforcement agencies in Florida's Miami Dade County, it also brought hope. Hope that it would help officers across all ranks learn to deal with their unique stressors and improve their mental health – and thus, help them be better officers. **Watch to learn more in Part 1.** [WATCH VIDEO](#)

No. 1 priority is to ensure officers can go home to their families

By Chief Rene Landa

South Miami Police Department,
Past-President, Miami-Dade County
Association of Chiefs of Police

I know everyone says the same thing, but I became a police officer because I wanted to help people. I wanted to make a difference. That was really important to me. Making a

difference in someone's life, being there for people who have been victimized,

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RESPONDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Changing the conversation: From PTSD to PTG

Post-traumatic growth is a proven framework. It details how struggle and trauma can be catalysts for growth and transformation in our lives. Researchers at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, first coined the term in 1995.



By Josh Goldberg

Executive Director, Boulder Crest Institute

Our nation's first responders are struggling mightily. This was true before COVID-19. But in the aftermath of non-stop service, illness and hardship, these incredible people are battling a range of mental health issues.

For far too many, the impact of service to their communities has become a burden. Retention and a growing apathy for service have become a problem. And leadership is worried about the future.

This is why FirstNet®, Built with AT&T partnered with Boulder Crest Foundation in 2021. Boulder Crest is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring first responders, combat veterans and their families can live great lives in the midst of hardship, stress, and struggle. Boulder Crest is the global leader in the development, delivery, study and scale of post-traumatic growth-based programs.

If you just did a double take when reading that final sentence, you are not alone. Knowledge of post-traumatic growth (PTG) is in the low single-digits. Few first responders can envision anything positive following the word post-traumatic. But Boulder Crest and FirstNet® aren't just imagining that possibility. They are bringing it to life for first responders across the country.

The PTG framework

Post-traumatic growth is a proven framework. It details how struggle and trauma can be catalysts for growth and transformation in our lives. Dr. Richard Tedeschi and Dr. Lawrence Calhoun, psychologists and researchers at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, first coined the term in 1995.

PTG provides a path for transforming struggle into strength and lifelong growth. In 2014, Boulder Crest's founder, Ken Falke, a retired Navy bomb disposal technician and the son of a Washington, D.C., police officer, and I met with Dr. Tedeschi.

The three of us discussed creating training programs that would help first responders, combat veterans and family members experience post-traumatic growth. And we began to develop the first-ever PTG-based program called Warrior PATHH, in 2014.

Warrior PATHH is a 90-day program that begins with a 7-day intensive initiation. It's now delivered by 9 teams in 8 states. And it's free to the first responder and combat veteran community.

Transforming struggle

In 2020, Boulder Crest began exploring ways to turn the COVID-19 pandemic into something positive and

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RESPONDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS



Boulder Crest has trained more than 1,600 first responders in the principles and practice of post-traumatic growth. It's hosted monthly, 5-day trainings for law enforcement in Dade County, FL, and with the Tucson Police Department in Arizona. In 2022-2023, Boulder Crest and FirstNet® are expanding efforts to other states.

Changing the conversation: From PTSD to PTG

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transform struggle into growth. We launched the First Responder Initiative. And we focused on changing the culture of first responders, in line with a quote from Tucson Police Chief Chad Kasmar:

“The reality is, these are human beings who have sick children, who have aging parents, who have just suffered a loss, who are still trying to process a child dying in their arms the shift before.”

“These are all things that if we don't create an environment where we can talk about it – where we can off-load those feelings and support each other – we're going to have outcomes in the field we don't want. And officers leaving the profession much sooner than they should.”

Just 18 months later – and thanks to the vision of FirstNet – Boulder Crest has trained more than 1,600 first responders in the principles and practice of post-traumatic growth. Boulder Crest has hosted monthly, 5-day trainings for law enforcement in Dade County, FL, and with the Tucson Police Department in Arizona.

In 2022-2023, Boulder Crest and FirstNet® are expanding efforts to North Carolina, South Carolina, Oregon, Massachusetts, Montana, and Virginia.

Training results

First responders have called the Struggle Well training:

- *“The best training I've ever received in my career.”*

- *“Something every member of the profession should experience.”*
- *“Life changing.”*

Training satisfaction surveys indicate an approval rating of more than 99 percent. And after the training, participants show statistically significant improvement (45%) in their post-traumatic growth scores.

Students continue to get support and access to a private social network and learning community through the Struggle Well App, refresher trainings and family trainings.

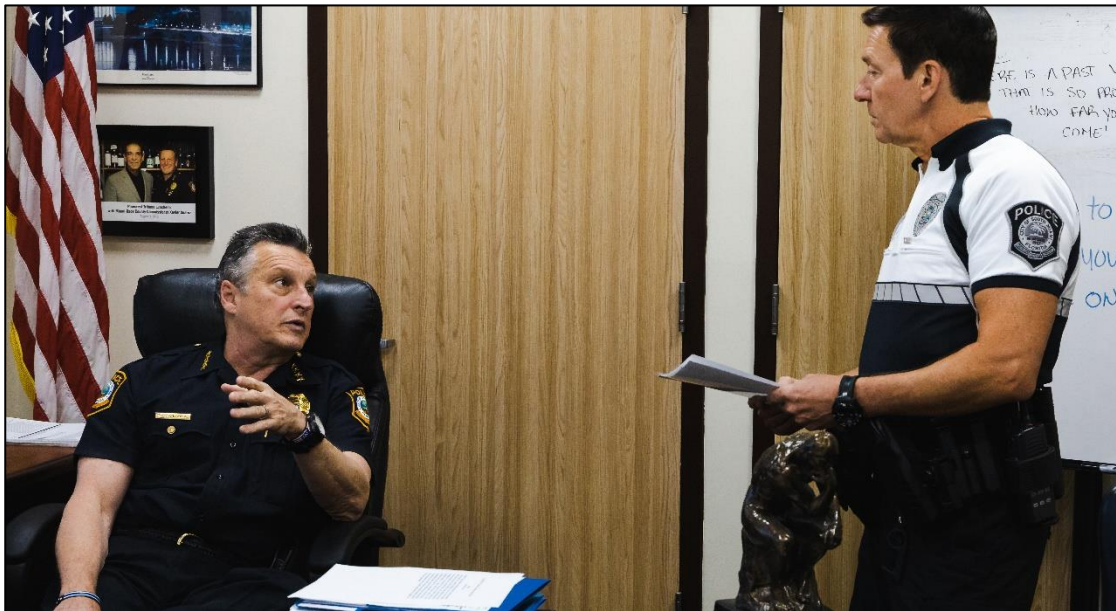
Four key principles

At the core of these trainings are four key principles:

- **Balancing the narrative:** We must move beyond our focus on disorder, diagnosis, dysfunction and diminishment to a conversation about growing through struggle (post-traumatic growth).
- **Normalizing struggle:** The professional and personal stressors that come with being an emergency responder are immense. So, the question is not whether a responder **will** struggle, but **how** they will struggle. Training that normalizes the impact of the lifestyle is a critical part of lifting the stigma that comes with the struggle and seeking help.
- **Integrating wellness and PTG into training:** It is critical that we integrate training focused on officers' well-being. And we need to do this with the same

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STRUGGLE WELL



"I always told my father, "The first day that I stepped in that car, I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life." It's been 42 years. And for me, it's still about helping people. It's about being there. ...Being present to let people know, "It's going to be okay,"" says Chief Landa

Officer wellness and safety main focus for Chief as past president of the Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police

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people who need assistance in some way.

I came from a family of attorneys. My father, my mother, my younger sister – all became attorneys. The thing in our family was to go to law school and that's what I started out doing. I was going to college studying criminal justice and my goal was to go to law school. But in 1978, before my last two years of college, I started taking classes with law enforcement officers.

We had a special program in Miami where if you were a law enforcement officer, you would get most of your education paid. So I took classes with them. I would watch them. I'd talk with them about the stories that really interested me. And then I did a ride-along.

I always told my father, "The first day that I stepped in that car, I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

It's been 42 years. And for me, it's still about helping people. It's about being there. Being there through a pandemic. Being present to let people know, "It's going to be okay. We're still here. We're responding to your calls. We're responding to you. How can I help you?"

A passion for the job

But being a cop comes with a lot of the stressors – many from within the organization. You're trying to prove to other officers that you're a top cop – that you're a good cop. You can be trusted. Because tomorrow when I'm going through that door and there's a guy on the other side who wants to kill me, he's got a gun, I can't turn around to my partner and ask, "Are you okay? Are you ready to go for this?" I have to trust and know that they've got my back and they're not going to let anything happen to me.

Cops are really passionate about the job itself. So, it's very difficult for us to balance between work and home. When you love your job, you want to be there all the time. You want to be with your partners. But you also have a family that you have to go and take care of and they're asking, "Hey, give me some time too. We want to go on vacation. We want to do something."

So the **real big stressor** is balancing between work and your personal life. Life is a struggle. But when you don that uniform and you put on that badge, you take on an entire other stressful part. You don this uniform and go out on the street and now you're dealing with other people's struggles. Sometimes those struggles are very much like our own.

When a call hits home

When my son was eight months old, we responded to a

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STRUGGLE WELL

Officer wellness and safety is main focus for Chief Landa

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call about a lady in the middle of the street screaming. When we got there, she was out on the street, holding an eight-month-old baby. The baby was blue.

She hands me her baby, and tells me, "Make him breathe." And we're trying to do everything we can – we're calling rescue. We're trying everything we can to make the baby breathe again. And that didn't happen. We couldn't help her.

So now I'm taking it personally. I'm thinking of my son who's eight months old. What do I want to do? I want to get off the job and go straight home and hug my son.

The mother was not in a good financial situation. So all the officers in the crew were able to go to the funeral home and take care of everything for her. That's another way of releasing that struggle. We come back and we do something to try to help.

Number one priority

My No. 1 priority with my officers is making sure they're safe at the end of the day and that they can go home to their families. How do we do that? We do that through training – like the Boulder Crest Struggle Well program. We do that through conversations. We do that through responding with each other to make sure we're not alone.

And we make sure we're doing the job the way we're supposed to be doing it. You've got to be watching what you're doing when you're talking to someone. If you make a traffic stop. There's a time to focus and make sure that what we're going through is per training, what we've practiced and what we've done.

With every single door you go through, every traffic stop you make, you don't know what you're getting yourself into. You don't know what that other person is thinking about. You don't know what they've been through in their life. So it's really important to be very sharp in what you're doing.

That's why we have to learn how to grow from those struggles. And that's why this Struggle Well training from the Boulder Crest Foundation is so important.

Implementing Struggle Well

When I became the president of the Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police last May, I got with all the chiefs in the Dade County area – 37 of them. I told them I



"I've had a lot of the officers come knock on my door and tell me, 'I don't know how many officers you want to put through this Chief. But if you can do it, send the whole department cause it's incredible,'" Chief Landa says.

wanted to focus on one goal for the entire year. And that goal was officer wellness.

I was thinking of so many aspects – the nutritional part, the physical part, the financial part and the mental wellness.

Within five days of being sworn in, I got a call from a retired chief of Miami-Dade County, Bernie Gonzalez. He told me about Boulder Crest – and what they were doing with PTSD with the military. And now they wanted to focus on first responders – on police officers. So, we started talking about how that would take place. And that's been a Godsend for the officers.

Every single chief bought into it. There was not one who said "No, I don't want any part of it."

Now we've got 30-40 officers going through it every month – from all the departments within Dade County.

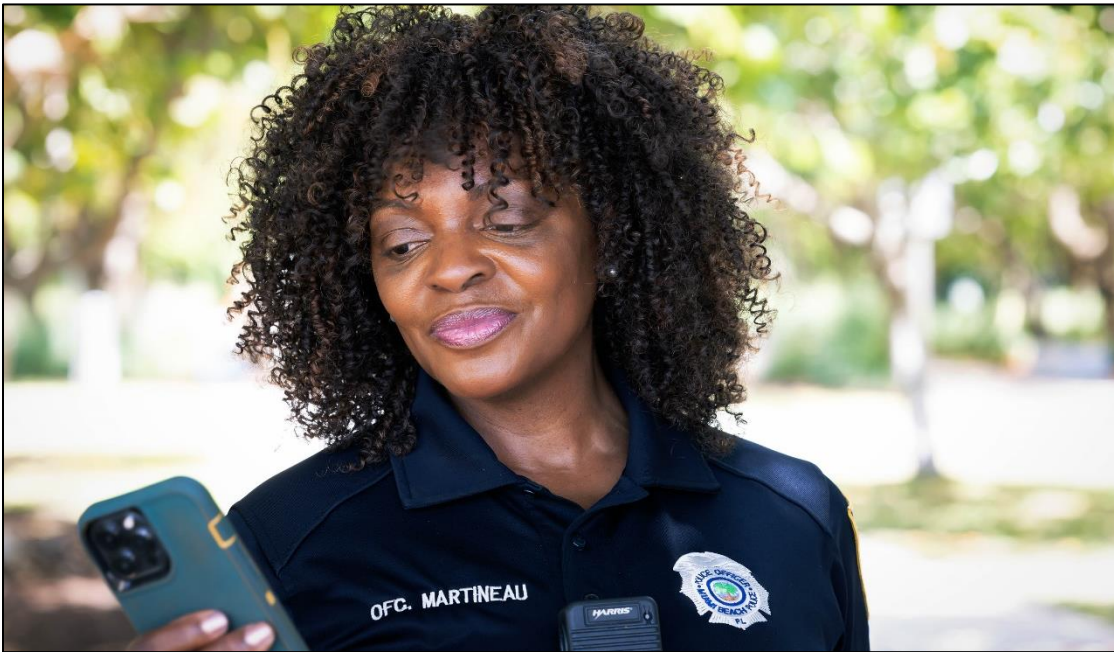
And the incredible thing is the buy-in that I'm getting from the police officers who are attending. For so long, police officers couldn't talk about it. They couldn't show any type of weakness. They wouldn't talk. They couldn't. If they did anything, it would be to go home and tell their loved one or at most, their partner.

But what I'm seeing with what we're doing with Boulder Crest and the Officer Wellness program has been incredible. Whether they've been on the force for 10 years or 20 plus years, they're opening up and getting it off their chest.

I've had a lot of the officers come knock on my door and tell me, "I don't know how many officers you want to put through this Chief. But if you can do it, send the whole

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STRUGGLE WELL



“Working for the jail system teaches you how to communicate. When you’re a corrections officer, the only thing you have on your belt is a pen. And they used to call that the mighty sword, because if you write somebody up, you take away their freedom even longer,” says Officer Martineau.

For neighborhood law enforcement officer, mental health is vital for longevity and success

By Deborah Martineau

Neighborhood Resource Officer
Miami Beach Police Department

I have been in law enforcement for 32 years. And I spent 10 years in the New York City Department of Corrections, Rikers Island.

My dad worked for New York City Department of Corrections, and one day he came home and said: “Fill out this application and become a corrections officer.”

I said, “No, I’m supposed to be an actress.” And he goes, “Well, no problem. You come, get this job, and you can act all you want there.”

Back then we listened to our parents. So, that’s how I started. And in 1990, the crack cocaine boom hit and the jails were full of people. Crack cocaine took over families. It was very sad. You would see mothers, daughters, grandmothers come to jail because of the addiction to crack cocaine.

So, it was a very rough time back then. We would have riots in the jails; it was a tough time.

Working behind bars

When I started, it was very long hours. You thought you

were going home, and then they would say, “You’re not going home.” So, there would be days that you would stay in the jail for one to two days without going home.

And we were shorthanded, so there was a lot of stress. We would take turns sleeping there. It was just a really, really bad situation because of the crack cocaine epidemic.

I had just got married and didn’t have any children yet. But I wanted to have a child. And staying in a prison for two and three days not being able to go home, it was very difficult.

But working for the jail system teaches you how to communicate. When you’re a corrections officer, the only thing you have on your belt is a pen. And they used to call that the mighty sword, because if you write somebody up, you take away their freedom even longer.

The other thing I learned is to always be prepared. To this day, I always have a bag with supplies with me. You were never sure when you were going to go home. So even now – 32 years later – I always have extra supplies with me.

And I’m always aware of my surroundings. Being in a dorm with 120 men, you always wanted to make sure you knew where all the exit doors were.

Back then, it was 20 years and you retired. But we always used to calculate, if you did 20 years, you did a 15-year sentence yourself, because of how long you were in

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For neighborhood officer, mental health is vital for longevity, success

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prison. You can't leave the property. You're stuck. So, it's like you actually did a sentence yourself, you know?

New scene, new role

In 1998, I moved to sunny Florida. I worked for a police department in Hialeah for two years, and then I went to what I consider the final destination – Miami Beach. I'm in my 20th year at Miami Beach. It was one of the best decisions I've made in my career. I love what I do at Miami Beach. I love working for the community. I love just meeting so many people.

Being a woman and being an officer is really tricky to balance, especially if you're married to another officer. If the child gets sick, who stays home? Who's going to call in sick to be with the child?

The mother usually does that. We risk our career because we have so many hats to wear. We have to make sure the children are okay. We have to make sure the parents are okay.

It's a lot because you still want to balance being there for your family and be that great cop that the department can call on as well. But in the back of your mind, you're saying, "My daughter needs me. I have my parents that need me."

I still have to balance both and it can get a little stressful when you're juggling all sides because everybody wants a piece of mom, right?

Step back and breathe

Struggle Well came to our police department and they put on a training for the peer support members. And one day, they just asked, "How are you doing today? How do you think the week is going to go?"

I sat back like, "Huh, no one has ever asked me that." It was like a bucket of tears coming down. It was the way they worded that question that had me opening up. And I said, "Wow, if they can do that to me, who handles everybody's problems, imagine what they can do to other officers who need this help." It was incredible. I



"Police work can be stressful at times, too. Unfortunately, we're the ones that have to contact you and tell you that your loved one was killed. We're human and a lot of people don't understand that we're just like anybody else and it will affect us just like anyone else," says Officer Martineau.

couldn't stop talking about it. Then they said, "Once you finish doing all of these tasks, sit back and just do this exercise. Just breathe. Breathe in, hold it and then breathe out. One, two, three, four."

I just sat there. I breathed in, I held it and I breathed out. It was like the stress went away. I said, "This is phenomenal."

Just the breathing alone made me feel so much better, because some days, we carry everything.

Stressors of the job

As you can imagine, police work can be stressful at times, too. Unfortunately, we're the ones that have to contact you and tell you that your loved one was killed. We're human and a lot of people don't understand that we're just like anybody else and it will affect us just like anyone else.

One day, my colleague and I responded to a drowning call. The father had gone to park the car and the mother brought the kids. While she was preparing the basket and stuff on the beach, the kids ran to the water. She didn't realize that the younger child, who was only 3 years old, had gone into the water. He drowned that quickly.

When we got there, fire rescue was working on the child.

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"Balancing mental health is extremely important because you want to make sure that you're good. How can you help someone if you're not good?"

– Deborah Martineau, Miami Beach Police Department, Neighborhood Resource Officer

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Officer wellness and safety is main focus for Chief Landa

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department 'cause it's incredible."

The bottom line is they've been storing it all inside. And nobody's ever sat them at the table all together and asked, "What are you struggling with?"

Community impact

If an officer is struggling himself because he hasn't been to the training, then he may not be prepared to handle someone else struggling with the same issue.

Let's just say he's going through a divorce. And he had to move out of his house – the house that he's lived in for 18 years with his son and daughter. Now, all of a sudden, he's on the street, and he's responding to a domestic call between a husband and wife who are going through a divorce. If he doesn't get the aggression out, if he doesn't get the pain and the struggling out of his system so he knows how to handle it, how can he be well enough to take care of somebody else's issue?

And that's the problem. We struggle. Officers struggle.

This initiative has the potential to change policing across this country. But we have to focus first and foremost on the police officer. They deserve this. And we owe it to them, as chiefs of police, to make sure they have a happy family life.

Once we focus on the officer and he's in a good place – he's well emotionally, physically, mentally – that's going to improve policing across the country.

When you have an officer that is in a good place with their family and everything else – and they're just passionate about the job – that's type of officer who's going out into the community to assist others who are struggling.

So is it gonna help the community? Absolutely.

Finding a release

I've had a long career, and I haven't seen officers open up like this.

On the first or second day of the training, you see the

tension. Everyone is standing apart – stand-offish. But when you come back on the fourth or fifth day, it's a bunch of smiles. It's, "Good morning, sir. How are you doing?"

It's incredible what you see, because people have opened up. They've had a great conversation to get it out of their system.

When I was a young officer, you had seven free visits to a psychologist. If you went through a situation, there was a number could call through human resources. You didn't have to tell your supervisor. You would call and they would make an appointment for you. And you would go down alone and talk to a therapist.

The main mission of this training is for the individual officer to release the struggle – to understand how to recognize that struggle. And to see what they can do about it and the help they can get. So, when they walk away from that class, they've made friends with other people who may be going through the exact same struggle.

Last year, there were 166 suicides by police officers. I would like to see that completely stop. I don't want to see another officer giving his life to a community – then turn around and commit suicide because he's keeping it all inside. I want it to stop. Completely.

That's what I want to see from the Struggle Well training.

Rene Landa has been Chief of Police for the South Miami Police Department for the last 8 years and is past president of the Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police. He began his career with the City of Miami Police Department in 1980, where he went through the police academy. He worked for the department for 27 years in various capacities, including patrol, undercover narcotics and the SWAT team, where he stayed for about 16 years, achieving the rank of lieutenant, then commander, of the SWAT team. He left the City of Miami Police Department and became major and then a division chief with the Key Biscayne Police Department, where he remained for 4 years. He left there to join the South Miami Police Department, where he started as a major, moving up the ranks to interim chief of police and his current role as chief.

“The main mission of this training is for the individual officer to release the struggle – to understand how to recognize that struggle.”

– Chief Rene Landa, South Miami Police Department,
Past-president, Miami-Dade County Association of Chiefs of Police

STRUGGLE WELL

Changing the conversation: From PTSD to PTG

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- regularity as any other critical skill set. We shouldn't view it as an ancillary topic. When we integrate wellness into the fabric of the organization, we have a positive impact in the culture of public safety.
- **Institutionalizing wellness and PTG training:** We have to weave this into the lifecycle of a responders' career. And we must start from the beginning of their training and continue through their transition out of the workforce.

Less PTSD and more PTG

This PTSD Awareness Month, let's consider talking less about PTSD and more about PTG. Let's talk about the possibilities to transform pain into purpose, loss into gain, and struggle into strength.

Let's talk about the fact that we have to do better. The cost of service to our communities shouldn't be the quality of someone's life and the lives of those they love.

Let's talk less about diminishment, dysfunction,

disconnection, and diagnosis and more about hope, connection, strength, gratitude and meaning. Let's make sure our nation's first responders can struggle well. They deserve it.

Josh Goldberg has served as the Co-Founder and Executive Director of the Boulder Crest Institute for Post-traumatic Growth since January 2018. In this role, He's responsible for leading the development, delivery, study and scaling of Post-traumatic Growth-based programs for time of struggle.

This includes developing and scaling Boulder Crest's transformative Warrior PATHH program (for combat veterans and first responders) to nine teams in eight states, and the creation of the First Responder Initiative, helping first responders in seven states and across the federal government. Over the past three years, Josh has taught more than 30,000 people how to Struggle Well.

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For neighborhood officer, mental health is vital for longevity, success

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The father didn't even know what was going on. And by the time he got to the hospital, the child had died.

At that time, I think my daughter must've been about seven or so. I remember calling my mother and just asking, "Where is she? Do you see her?" Because, like I said, you're away from your children for a long time and you just want to know if they're okay.

And even though she's with my mother, I know she's okay, but you just think about that incident and how quickly things can change.

I never forget that story.

Finding Balance

I think balancing mental health is extremely important because you want to make sure you're good. How can you help someone if you're not good? You want to make sure you recognize something. If you're going through something, make sure that you're able to recognize that and reach out to the resources that can help you. There are a lot of resources out here that can help, especially in peer support.

I want to make sure that I'm always good and also

"I want to make sure that I'm always good and also recognize that if I'm having a bad day, it's okay. It's okay to have a bad day. Take a breath and start over."

Deborah Martineau,
Miami Beach Police Department,
Neighborhood Resource Officer

recognize that if I'm having a bad day, it's okay. It's okay to have a bad day. Take a breath and start over. That's the good thing about tomorrow. You can always start over. You just have to recognize what's going on today.

If I had to give one word of advice about mental health training in policing, it would be to breathe.

Deborah Martineau is a neighborhood resource officer with Miami Beach Police Department for Area One, South Beach area. She has been in law enforcement for 32 years. She spent the first 10 years of her career as a corrections officer in the New York City Department of Corrections, Rikers Island.

STRUGGLE WELL

Struggle Well program evokes roller-coaster of emotions – and the coping skills officers need, says Miami sergeant

*When I first found out about the Struggle Well class, I was forced to go. I'm one of the sergeants in the peer support unit. And they told me, "Hey, you're going to this class."
And I said, "Man, I don't need to go."
And they said, "No, no, you're going."
I went in with a very bad attitude. I was in a dark place in my life.*



By Sgt. Orestes "Tico" Guas, Jr.
City of Miami Police Department

I can actually pinpoint the day I decided to become a law enforcement officer. I was 15 years old and I saw a call where my father was on TV. A guy had broken into a house and my dad had to go in and find him with the dog. He was a K-9 officer.

When they came out and I saw everything they had done, that was the day that I decided this was what I wanted to do.

I'm a sergeant with the City of Miami Police Department in charge of the Allapattah area. I have seven officers and three public service aides working under me. I've been with the City of Miami Police Department for 18 years. I'm a second-generation police officer. My father was with the city for 20 years.

From call to call to call...

As an officer, you're jumping from call to call to call to call. You have to complete these reports. You have to write accident reports. And sometimes my guys don't get a chance to finish one call before they're going on another one.

For me, the stressors are my guys. Are they safe? Is this a call that I need to go to?

I have seven officers working under me. Realistically, it's more than that because everybody who works on day shift I consider mine. So you're talking about 25-26 people working on day shift. And I go to anything that I consider a hot call because I want to make sure that everybody makes it home.

One of the things that I do at roll call every morning is make sure that I make everybody laugh before we go out on the road. You don't know what's going to happen that day. You don't know if it's the last time you're going to see that person. So I want to make sure everybody leaves with a smile on their face and I set the happiness for the day.

I learned this through the Struggle Well program.

Learning about Struggle Well

When I first found out about the Struggle Well class, I was forced to go. I'm one of the sergeants in the peer support unit. And they told me, "Hey, you're going to this class."

And I said, "Man, I don't need to go."

And they said, "No, no, you're going."

I went in with a very bad attitude. I was in a dark place in my life. But after the first couple of hours, I said, "You know what? Maybe these people are on to something." And I started listening.

I'm a very vocal person. I'm not afraid to speak my mind.

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STRUGGLE WELL

“I used to drink a lot. I would drown my sorrows in a bottle of whiskey. I no longer do that. I don’t look to alcohol to take care of my issues.”

– Sgt. Orestes “Tico” Guas, Jr., City of Miami Police Department

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So I think I surprised the instructors a bit with how rash I am. By the second day, they approached me and said, "Hey, listen. I think you would benefit from going to the full week program."

I went home and I told my wife, "Hey, listen. I think I might want to do this. These two guys suggested I should go to this class."

I told her, "I'm pretty ----- up." She agreed and she told me: "Fill out the paperwork. What do you have to lose?"

So I filled out the paperwork and we went through that class. As that week went on, we all started opening up to each other. To this day, these are some of the people that I trust the most, because of this class. I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot of coping mechanisms. I've shared a lot of that with other people.

Before Struggle Well

I used to drink a lot. I would drown my sorrows every day in a bottle of whiskey when I would get home. I no longer do that. I don't look to alcohol to take care of my issues. I don't look for those horrible methods, anymore. I actually listen now at home. Before I would shut down. I wouldn't speak to anybody.

The only downfall I think is now when I'm asked, "How was your day?" I always ask, "Do you really want to know? Or do you want me to tell you what you want to hear?" So now my family has the option of really knowing what my day is or a fruity story.

They always choose the reality. Before, I would never tell anybody what my day was like. I would just swallow it.

The only person that I had that I could talk to about it was my dad. I talk to my dad at least two or three times a day. It never fails. By 10 a.m. is the first phone call: "Hey, how's your day going?"

Thankfully, I have that support. But I never wanted to burden my wife and my kids with the reality of this job.

A dark place

There's stressors at work not only on the road but from within the job. Things you have to do. Reports to clear.

Trying to make everything easy for everybody who works under me. Trying to make the right decisions on the road. Second guessing yourself afterwards. It's a lot on a person.

Hearing officers running to a call. And you can't get there fast enough and they're fighting for their lives. Driving to a call when you're running with lights and sirens and people don't get out of your way.

All that while dealing with the stressors of paying a mortgage. Paying for your car. "Are my kids okay? Did my kids make it to school? Did she pass that test for chemistry?"

All these stressors add up. And if you don't have a way of speaking to somebody, or coping with what's going on, you keep bottling it in and bottling it in. And just pushing it down and pushing it down, until one day, you blow up.

And sometimes that could be on somebody on the street. Most of the time, it's something that happens at home and it causes a lot of tension in your house.

Finding a balance

My wife deserves a monument for putting up with me and the things that I've done – for putting my family second and my job first. You have to learn to balance it and the darkness. It's learning that fine balance of your family life with your work life and not letting one overpower the other.

The most memorable calls for me are when I get to help children with special needs. We had one recently about a six-year-old boy found in the middle of a busy street. He was on the autism spectrum. We had to go for blocks knocking door-to-door to find where he lived.

I didn't know when he had eaten last or when he had bathed last. So I bought him a meal. When the parents finally showed up, we found out it was a miscommunication where one thought the other one was taking the child to school.

Being able to help the special needs community is very big for me. I have a 21-year-old son who's on the autism spectrum and a 19-year-old daughter who's a cancer survivor.

I was applying for the police academy when my son was

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STRUGGLE WELL

Struggle Well program evokes roller-coaster of emotions – and the coping skills officers need, says Miami sergeant

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diagnosed with autism. A month later, my daughter, who was 6 months old, was diagnosed with cancer. They're two years apart.

An unforgettable day

I'll never forget the day. We were taking a practice test for the state exam. It was my daughter's last surgery and I had to choose whether to take this practice test or be at the hospital.

My wife and I spoke about it and she told me, "Listen, you need to take that practice test because you need this job."

So, my instructors would stop us every hour, on the hour, give me a cell phone, and I would walk out and call my wife to see what the progress was on the surgery. And then I'd walk in, give my class the thumbs up and we'd go back to our test. They were, all 40, my support group during that time. And we have a very close bond still to this day.

My daughter's surgery was successful. She had a neuroblastoma that they found by mistake. They were doing an x-ray. And instead of getting her from the neck down, they got her from the chin down. They found the tumor wrapped around the subclavian artery, where it branches from the brain to the left arm. The tumor came off her artery without any other issues and it was a success from there forward.

Mental health training: Necessary

I couldn't begin to describe the need for mental health awareness for first responders in one word. I think it's absolutely necessary. We're having the highest suicide rates right now that we've ever had with police and fire. A lot of our first responders are also prior military. They're veterans.

I'll never claim to know what they've been through, but I know what they go through on the streets. And if you don't have an escape route where you can deal with your emotions and deal with what you see daily, that's where we end up with suicides and all these issues, as well as marital issues. Now we have something that can help us – where we can actually learn to speak and it's OK to speak about our emotions.



"If I had to describe the Struggle Well training in one word, it would be a rollercoaster. Everybody is going to experience it differently. But Struggle Well is one of the best trainings I've ever been to in the police department," said Sgt. Guas.

Roller-coaster of emotions

When you go into the training, you're at the bottom. Then they bring you up. And as you're going up, you realize that you're worse than what you really thought, so you go back down. And then they bring you right back up where you can stay on top.

So if I had to describe the Struggle Well training in one word, it would be a rollercoaster. Everybody is going to experience it differently.

But Struggle Well is one of the best trainings I've ever been to in the police department. I would venture to say it is **the** best training because it's about how you're gonna get through this.

It's never been how do you take care of yourself. It's how do you get through things. It's how do you do things. And for the first time ever, it's about me.

Sgt. Orestes "Tico" Guas has 18 years' experience in law enforcement. He is a supervisor with the City of Miami Police Department and has worked in multiple units, including patrol, undercover jump downtown, the gang unit and the assaults unit.

From the assaults unit, he was promoted to road sergeant and then canine sergeant, serving on the canine unit. He's been a sergeant in patrol for the last six years.