2019 Conference

Ali Rothrock
CEO & Lead Instructor

“building more resilient first responders”
Why do I do this?
All experiences are valid.
Trauma taught me 3 things:

1. The world was not a safe place.
2. People could not be trusted.
3. Everything that happened was my fault.
The long term impacts of feeling unsafe in our work environment:

March 2019, Journal of the Society of Occupational Medicine

“In addition to the stressors associated with the work of first-responders, women firefighters are likely to experience challenges associated with being female in a male oriented work environment. Gender discrimination and harassment are also likely to increase a woman’s risk for traumatic stress and suicidal ideation.”
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
“PTSI”

My body and brain had learned to not trust the world around me.

I had to re-learn how to deal with all emotions in a healthy way.
Recovery takes work but every day is worth it.
Recovery

OVER A CUP
a podcast
Produced by
Featuring
Hosted by Ali Rothrock
My story can be seen as extreme but similarities exist in all fire houses.
• Are you really seeing what could be going on in your fire house?

• Have you ever questioned your safety in your station?

  • Have you asked your fellow firefighters if they’ve questioned theirs?

• Do the necessary people have a seat at the table?
As fire service leaders, do you:

- Know how to have a trauma-informed work place?
- Know what to do if someone is sexually assaulted in your station?
- Understand the sexual violence continuum as it relates to the fire service?
As fire service leaders, do you:

- Know how to recognize signs of mental health struggle?
- Know how to talk about them?
- Share your reactions to tough calls?
- Understand basic mental health concepts?
We know what to bring with us to the scene of a call.

But what do we do with what we take home?
Whether you’re on a battlefield, on a fire ground or experiencing trauma in a place where you’re supposed to feel safe –

the impact is the same.
The Stress Continuum
The Stress Continuum

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD
Up to 24 hours → 72 hours → 31+ days
TYPES OF STRESS

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Symptoms
These are very common.

- Repeating / reliving the incident
- Dreaming of the incident
- Difficulty eating / sleeping / keeping routine
- Uncharacteristic anxiety / mood swings

- Usually after a few sleep cycles we get back to baseline.
TYPES OF STRESS

Post Traumatic Stress \(\rightarrow\) Acute Stress \(\rightarrow\) PTSD

Acute Stress
(the first 30 days)

- *Can be* the predecessor of PTSD
- PTS symptoms do not lessen over time
TYPES OF STRESS

Post Traumatic Stress → Acute Stress → PTSD

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
(31 days+ post event)

4 main elements:
• Repeated reliving of the event(s)
• Avoidance of the event(s)
• A pattern of increased arousal & hypervigilance
• Becomes the organizing principal in one’s life

Trauma Informed Toolkit, 2013
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary, traumatic or dangerous event.

It is a natural defense mechanism and response to significant or prolonged trauma.

It’s never too late to address it.
What do you say if someone opens up about a struggle they’re having?

“That makes sense.”
“I’m really sorry to hear that you’re struggling”
“Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me this.”

Think about what you’d like to hear and say that.
Do you share your reactions to tough calls with your crew?

Talking about calls that affect you does not make you bad at your job and it does not undermine your authority.

It promotes team unity and normalizes *normal* reactions.
What can we do to alleviate post-traumatic stress symptoms?

• After each significant or critical call
  • After each traumatic call

• What’s the difference?
Firefighters & Mental Health

Barriers and stigmas exist which make us think that either help is not there or that we are unable to access it.

Struggling with your mental health is not a choice, it is not a character flaw, not a weakness and not your fault.
Willing my way through it

- Sleeping issues
- Eating issues
- Panic Attacks
- Constant fear
- Isolation

Level of Functioning

Time

ON THE JOB AND OFF
Active Recovery

Healing isn’t linear but it is cumulative!
We always have a choice.

**Post Traumatic Stress**

- **Growth** (positive coping, support systems)
  - Stay connected to your sources of joy!
- **Disorder** (negative coping, isolation)
Why I created On the Job and Off

I realized that the first responders that needed help the most were often the furthest from it.

Other behavioral and mental health trainings for first responders were either too clinical or too personal. Anti-harassment courses were sanitized and over-simplified.

We set out to create mental health content that was logistically, financially and emotionally accessible to first responders everywhere.
Why online?

Online courses allow each participant to engage without the social pressure that can come when learning in groups.

Online courses allow the participation to learn at their own pace.

Designated team leaders are able to see all participants progress.
You are prepared for every situation. 
We prepare you for what you take home.

On the Job and Off develops online training for first responders through education and shared experience.

"Capturing the Load should be made mandatory for all first responders."

Matthew Soderquist
Michigan

Why This Matters

57%
FEEL THEIR CURRENT TRAINING IS INADEQUATE
We aim to close this gap by providing accessible and affordable education to individuals and departments.

34%
HAVE HAD THEIR ABILITY TO WORK EFFECTED
With first responder's work being so critical, education that empowers individuals to overcome a mental health challenge has to be a priority.

87%
SAY THEIR JOB HAS A SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH
First responders need to be as prepared for what they will take home from work as they are prepared to handle what they face while on shift.
At the start of this year we partnered with the NVFC to give 1000 first responders access to our first course. Their feedback showed us our course style works.
We created additional courses based on the topics requested by the first 1000 students.

We re-launched as an annual membership platform on September 1st, 2019.
Addressing the 4 questions I get asked the most

- Ali's personal story
- Equality vs. Equity
- How to be a trauma-informed leader
- Understanding the sexual violence continuum
- Preventing sexual harassment and assault in the fire service
• Understand the human elements of addiction
  • Why addiction is so hard to overcome
• How addiction affects the people we serve and that affects us
  • Addiction within the fire service
Full course menu currently available for dispatchers

Full course menu for EMS coming very soon

ON THE JOB AND OFF

ON THE JOB AND OFF
Annual Individual, Department and State-wide Memberships available.

Chiefs or Training Officers come see me for free 7 day access.
Questions?

Ali Rothrock

ali@onthejobandoff.com