



Mid-Level Support Networks

Speaker 1: You are listening to a SAFLEO Sessions Podcast, a production of the National Suicide Awareness for Law Enforcement Officers Program. The SAFLEO Program is funded through grants from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, BJA, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The points of view and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the podcast authors and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice. Here's your host.

Brandon P.: Hello, I'm Brandon Post, a captain with the Provo, Utah, Police Department and host for this edition of the SAFLEO Sessions Podcast. I am joined today by Matthew Faulk. How are you doing today, Matt?

Matt F.: Not too bad. How about yourself, Brandon?

Brandon P.: Doing good. Doing good. Excited to be here.

Matt F.: Absolutely the same.

Brandon P.: Quick bio on Matt—Matt's career began at the Tucson Police Department. He was promoted to sergeant of patrol and was over their mobile field force program. Later, he was assigned to the audit and best practices program, research and analysis, and the Office of the Chief of Police. In 2018, Sergeant Faulk became the advanced training division manager at the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission.

Currently, Matt works as a law enforcement and public service sector contractor. We're going to talk about mid-level leadership and mid-level support networks. One of the things we teach is officer safety and wellness, and a common question that I'd really like to address today that I've had people come up and ask me after teaching is—we've got these good sergeants and lieutenants who are trying to take care of their people and doing a good job, but they're finding when they experience something difficult, that it's a little more difficult for them to find a support network. There seems to be some degree of isolation as

officers move up the ranks. Matt, my question for you is, where do supervisors go to receive support? Because they've got to take care of themselves first before they can take care of other people.

Matt F.: Absolutely do. I think you really need to look at where the options can be, meaning that it is tough, and it has been a difficult thing within the law enforcement profession to—when you do promote, as you said, feel a little bit more isolated. But I think the real important thing to do is to look at who you have around you and the resources that you do have. You look at, within the rank of, say, sergeant—you have peers that are there. I think one of the biggest keys to have that healthy environment and have that wellness piece involved with that sergeant capacity is to have those good, strong peer relationships.

What I mean by that are honest relationships, trustful relationships. Identify the people that you can go to, that you can talk with, that you can share and bounce ideas off of each other, so you build that real strong trust. I think also, if you look at outside of your agency—I think it's really important to if you have other friends within law enforcement that are peers, to talk to them and reach out to them and stay in communication with them. A lot of the best conversations I had were with other sergeants or lieutenants with other agencies that would share with me what they're going through, both from a tactical perspective, from a job perspective, but also from a personal perspective—what they were feeling with themselves, what they were going through with their wellness and emotions, and also with their personnel, with their teams.

With that, what you really gain is those other perspectives that are outside of your agency. We talk about our agencies, and we talk about silos, and I'm sure we'll probably discuss a little bit more later, but we have a tendency to really isolate ourselves. Even within an agency, you have your specific culture. What's really great to reach outside of your own agency is to hear other agencies' cultures too. It's almost as if you're talking to another coach, if you're coaching a team.

Brandon P.: I agree. I agree completely on that.

Matt F.: Because if you look at coaches, and you look at different coaches—I was a big basketball player. When I was a basketball player, I tried to be big, but you look at the different coaches that you have. If you look at just coach's meetings, and you come together and you share your different perspectives or you make sure that you're bouncing different ideas off each other—it's really a wellness component to step out of our own environment, our own boundaries. A lot of times, getting that fresh

perspective—that aha moment will come up when you least expect it during those conversations.

Brandon P.: Yeah, I agree. That's actually—in my career, that's something I've tried to take advantage of because we have a multijurisdictional SWAT team, and I was fortunate enough to be on SWAT for a number of years and developed some pretty close relationships with individuals from other jurisdictions. While I think it's really important to, like you said, have peers within your agency that you can talk to, it's also nice to just be able to reach outside, especially if you are struggling and looking for some support. It's something you may not necessarily be comfortable disclosing within your own agency that talking to someone outside the agency can offer a lot of comfort, because as we know, we need to talk about these things. We need to receive support. We're human beings, and we're going to be affected by some of the things we see. We need to be able to receive support from individuals to unpack some of the stuff we deal with.

Matt F.: Absolutely.

Brandon P.: Tell me a little bit about what you think of supervisors taking part in—maybe some private counselors or the employee assistance program, and then especially critical incident debriefings after a specifically stressful incident. Because my big belief is if we have a critical incident, it's really important for the supervisor to take charge and show that that it's okay to talk about some of these things.

Matt F.: I couldn't agree more with you, Brandon. When you're looking at critical incident debriefings, really the whole key of that—to work and to be effective and to be the most effective, I believe tactically, and also from a wellness standpoint, is for that supervisor to step up and be the first one to talk. The first one to share their experience—what they did right in that incident, but really importantly, what they would do differently or ask for input on what to do differently. I think, when you look at a wellness capacity, and a lot of wellness has to do with trust. That helps build that trust that you can have during those conversations, so immediately say that, "Although I'm the supervisor here, I'm going to take that leading from the front mentality and say, 'this is what I've learned from this, and what can I learn from you also?'"

When you're looking at critical incident debriefings, that's a moment to pull everyone together. You've just been through something because it's critical. People are looking for also leadership, but they're also looking for that opportunity to do it better next time. That's part of our profession is we always want to do it better. You look at that, but

there's a wellness piece, that wanting to do it better also, "How do I get healthier and have a wellness component coming from this?" You're going to have people during those critical incidents that just had to probably do something or be involved in something that was, once again, out of that norm. That was probably personally challenging—even though they're well trained and were ready to get through it, there's a human component there.

When you add in that piece to say, as a supervisor, "I'm here," this is what I did. But the moment you switch to, "This is what I would do differently," or "What do you feel I could have done differently to help lead this incident?" that becomes a factor of a human component too. It shows that you're concerned, not only about the tactics of the incident, but the actual wellness of everybody involved also.

Brandon P.: Yep. I agree that for critical incident stress debriefing to be successful, there has to be that rigorous examination of, "How are we doing? What can we learn from this? What can we do better?" But then the wellness piece at the end is, well, obviously important for our quality of life. What are the possible positives and negatives of a supervisor reaching out and seeking help?

Matt F.: Well, I think you look at the positive and negatives. I think, quite often, we've focused on the negatives, and a lot of it has to do with the culture of the organization that they work with and the environment up to that point. The negatives, traditionally, have been that it can be viewed as being—that you're soft, you're not strong, you're not able to take care of yourself. A lot of times, through that traditional role within law enforcement, you have to be that pillar of strength within your role, within that supervisor role. But I think we're starting to get to the point where we're starting to realize that the pillar of strength means that you understand that you do need to get assistance, that you do need to be able to speak to someone.

That wellness is so important. Being a supervisor, you're dealing with so much. I always like to refer to supervisors as being the hub. You're the hub of the field, you're the hub of your command staff, you're the hub of your community, and you're the hub of all your personnel. There's a lot of stress involved with that

I think a lot of strength comes with understanding that that's a lot of stress, a lot of different factors involved. I need to make sure that I'm staying healthy to be able to do this correctly. I think also, it allows you to take a step back. The one big positive in getting wellness help as a supervisor is it allows you to take a step back to get that larger

perspective. Whether it's an incident that you've been through or just how you are personally.

Brandon P.: Ultimately, that makes you a better supervisor to be able to take that step back and do that.

Matt F.: Absolutely does. It also will come across to your personnel that you're a human being, that you don't think you're this person or this pillar that cannot have any sort of faults or flaws or human moments. They're not really even faults or flaws. They're human moments.

Brandon P.: The unattainable standard.

Matt F.: Yes, absolutely. I think that's where setting an example as a supervisor to do that is a very, very powerful thing. One of the things that I shared quite often in my career is that I went to counseling quite often. I was very open about it because I wanted that why question from them, because the why question for me was to be able to share, "Well, this is who I am. This is the roles that I work. This is how you may view me in this supervisory position or these different roles, but let me then tell you why I am the way I am and why I lead the way I do and why I believe that wellness is so important."

Brandon P.: See, it's got a lot of value right there. It's got a lot of value. Because I remember talking to—when I was a sergeant and talking to individuals who have been struggling with something, if I'm suggesting EAP to them, but I have no experience with it whatsoever, I make it seem like it's weakness. That's not something they're going to take advantage of or get the help. So, it was actually very advantageous that I had used our employee assistance program also, and I could give a positive experience and recommendation and tell them how it worked. It normalizes—it humanizes the experience. Yeah, I can't agree with you more.

Matt F.: It absolutely does. Another thing with the EAP programs is that you look at—when the supervisor, if you're a supervisor that receives those EAP reports on your officers, are you are checking boxes on them or are you really looking at them? Because there's a chance to really connect right there. My personal belief is that it should never be an EAP checklist. It should be a—you're having an ability to look at someone's—kind of what's going on with them. Like you said, that's how you can change that into being a very proactive, healthy wellness piece or something that, unfortunately, a lot of times has become—it's had a negative connotation with it. But when used properly, it could be a very, very powerful strong, healthy wellness piece.

Brandon P.: I agree. All right, so here's the big question. What about supervisors who are part of an organization or culture, and they feel that the department has a kind of—and I think in law enforcement, we're doing a lot better than we have in the past, but what if we've got individuals who are part of a culture that has a tendency to "eat their own?" What's your recommendation for people who are in that type of culture, and if they need to reach out and ask for support or help, how do they do that?

Matt F.: I think that that's where it really comes to leadership. You look at those leadership principles of being a supervisor, and you look at what you know you have to do. Those type of environments—those types of department cultures that have that "eat your own" mentality, it's time to really look at your self-awareness and your actual self-wellness. You look at the role that you do. You're helping supervise. You're influencing—

Brandon P.: Yeah, take care of yourself first.

Matt F.: Absolutely. Take care of yourself first, because you're influencing so many people, not only the people that you're supervising that possibly you're overseeing, but also the other squads that are involved. Then there's the next role, of course, of then your officers, your personnel going out and having those actual contacts with your community members. You look at that, and there's a real trickling effect involved with that. Really, it comes down to remembering that you're a leader, that you're in a defined leadership role. There's a large responsibility of that to make sure that—the one thing you can do is set a tone for your squad, for your environment, for your circle.

From that, you can really set a different tone. Brandon, one of the things I wanted to mention about "eating your own" culture is—and you're looking for further assistance, you have private counselors too, and I think that's something that can be really important when you're in that "eat your own" culture type of environment is to go out of that space and get a private counselor. It's interesting because I think you look at the whole counseling piece within law enforcement—I think one of the areas you can really gain that human perspective is having a private counselor that maybe doesn't have a law enforcement background, but they can help bring some of that human component.

Brandon P.: See, that's an interesting—I'd like you to dive a little deeper in that. Because that's an interesting thought, because one of the things we constantly hear is, "If we're going to have a counselor in law

enforcement, it needs to be somebody who understands law enforcement. Otherwise, that counselor that we talk to is going to need a counselor.”

Matt F.: Exactly.

Brandon P.: I really like your perspective on this. So, let’s do a little bit of a deeper dive in that, if you don’t mind.

Matt F.: Sure, sure, absolutely. You look at it, and like you said, most agencies, they really look to hire a counselor that has a law enforcement background, and that’s understanding for the entire environment—to understand and navigate the different components that are involved with an actual organization, an actual agency. But from an individual standpoint, you can really look at stepping away from that. We have a habit, as we talk about a lot in law enforcement, becoming silos, or we say going down rabbit holes. A lot of that is because we don’t step out of that culture, that environment.

Finding an outside private counselor that really doesn’t focus on what you do for a living, but who you are as a person. I think that’s a lot of power in that, a lot of personal power that I’ve experienced with that. You cannot be Commander Post or Sergeant Faulk. You can be Matt and Brandon. You can go to a private counselor, go in, and just be you. They aren’t necessarily going to focus on your law enforcement career, on the actual incidents components that are happening within the agency. They’re probably going to do a lot of touching base on just who you are and how you’re doing. We talked about that self-accountability.

Brandon P.: Yeah. I’ve got to say, that’s an interesting perspective on that.

Matt F.: Gotcha. Because we talk so much about self-accountability and making sure that you’re taking care of yourself, but there’s taking care of yourself from the professional standpoint—that uniform that you’re wearing. For me, it’s more important to take care of that human that’s underneath the uniform, because that’s going to come through that uniform no matter what. That’s who you are.

Brandon P.: I love that thought, because a big belief I have is that the sum total of who we are is more than just an officer that—while noble honorable and I love the profession, an officer is not who I am. It is what I do.

Matt F.: Absolutely.

Brandon P.: I think there'd be an immense value to talking to a counselor as law enforcement experience, but I'd never really thought about a counselor who didn't have any experience, so just trying to touch on the human side. That's gave me something to think about. I appreciate that.

Matt F.: Absolutely. I will even share with you, Brandon, and the first time I went to a private counselor outside of the law enforcement realm, it was an eye-opening experience. I sat there and said, "Okay, they're asking about me. They're asking about things that are really deep inside." One of the things we do too, within law enforcement, is to get through what we see, what we do, we have to put a layer up. We have to separate ourselves a little bit from what we're seeing and what we're doing. It was really nice to go into a counselor and just have them get underneath that layer. I had the comfort. It was a safe environment. I felt that healthy vulnerability that I needed to have to be able to say, underneath what I'm doing out there as a supervisor, this is also what I'm feeling as a human, and no matter what, that's going to be there.

Brandon P.: We have stresses and concerns that are outside of law enforcement too. Yeah, it makes sense.

Matt F.: Yes, yes. Brandon, I think we talk, and we look at our job, but we also have our lives. We have things that are happening outside of our work environment that really have nothing directly to do with the job, but what they have directly to do with is us as human beings. You look at your home life, you look at other circumstances that are going on—how are your kids doing? How's your house doing? How are your finances doing? All these other components that are going on that can really affect your overall wellness. You look at those, and I think, for me, I found that a private counselor just really dialed in on those and really challenged me to really focus on those a lot more.

What I found is by having to really look at those personal pieces, it made me then look at my work, the things that are going on to work from a different perspective. It brought more depth and understanding from that human component, which of course, being a supervisor is what we want to make sure that—

Brandon P.: Oh, nice.

Matt F.: Yeah. As a supervisor, we want to have that human component. Part of being a strong leader is to have that human component to you. That helped me really build and develop that, to make sure that I'm keeping that very well balanced.

Brandon P.: Yeah. I think that would allow the people we work with to connect to us better.

Matt F.: Yes.

Brandon P.: We connect better to human beings rather than the unattainable robot standard that we can never achieve. What do you say to those who believe that? Or they say, "I'm only a sergeant. I'm only a lieutenant. I can't make a significant difference throughout my entire organization."

Matt F.: I would say that—that challenge yourself with that. You have the ability to have a positive influence on your circle. I think that's the really biggest—is to really look at what you can directly have an influence on. You have the ability, in those roles, not to just really have to be focused on one area more than the other. You can balance them.

Brandon P.: Oh, absolutely. My big belief when I was a sergeant is that briefing is my kingdom. Though, obviously, certain things that I had to teach and talk about and cover in briefings or different things going on within the city, but I always had time where I could address and talk about things that I felt were important specifically to the individuals on my shift. That's my kingdom. You absolutely have a degree of influence within that circle of influence, within your span of control. I love that.

Matt F.: Absolutely. I think that briefings and roll calls are some of the best 15 to 30 minutes that you can have. It really will dictate—what you put into it is what your personnel is going to get out of it, what your team's actually going to get out of that.

A big key to that, Brandon, too, is that—because through all those different conversations you have, when it starts at the beginning, just the interaction with you and your officer in that one-on-one, are you sharing the whys and the hows? Are you giving them the background on why you're doing this, on why you approach things that way? Find time to do that. I think it's critically important to find time to share your whys. "This is why I do this, and this is how we get this across."

Brandon P.: Love it.

Matt F.: Then that person becomes a really informed leader. They move forward having that mental Rolodex of, "Hey, these are the things that I just learned," and they can go back to them. Then they add on by their experiences that they're going to have. So, I think that just builds a library for them of the whys and hows, which is so important. Because that's what you go back to. That's how you build leaders.

Brandon P.: Start with why.

Matt F.: Start with why. You build leaders that way. You build very strong thinking, decision making leaders. One of the things I would do, Brandon, is every new shift with a new squad, I would send out an informal information sheet, and what it would really include were just questions like, "What's your favorite food? What's your favorite song?"

Brandon P.: Oh, really? Nice.

Matt F.: Yeah. You didn't have to fill it out. It wasn't required, but it was just to get a background on just who the person was, the human components of them. One of the questions that I asked was, "What's your favorite place that you've taken a vacation recently?" I had an officer, Brandon, that I found that he hadn't taken a vacation in seven years. Seven years. I paused and looked. I was stunned and I was shocked. But it just really hit me that, "Wow, this officer has not taken a vacation in the past seven years." Here he is in my squad, he's now a member of our environment, of our team. What I wanted to do immediately was to say, "Hey, let's get that to you." That was the real positive message of that, was saying that—I wanted to understand who you are, and also paying attention to what they actually told me too. I think that's very important as a leader.

Brandon P.: Yeah. It shows you're taking care of them and you're interested in them.

Matt F.: And I just asked him, "Do you mind asking why?" What he explained to me, I saw other heads in the room starting to nod. In seven years, he hadn't really felt the support to be able to say, "I need to take a break and just go be with my other family members, to step out of this environment." It was twofold. It was seeing the other people in the rooms, heads start to nod saying, "Okay, we've had similar experiences with that." Once again, you talk about culture and "eat your own" culture.

Brandon P.: Yeah. That's a problem.

Matt F.: Yeah.

Brandon P.: That's a problem. We need to decompress. We need time to get away and decompress.

Matt F.: Absolutely. That's a moment to really set that tone is what you just said. When I said, "You know, just let us know how much time you need, and hey, you had some work going on, anybody else want to pick that up?" You should've seen the amount of hands shoot up to say, "Hey, we've all got you, man. We want to get you to have this vacation, to take a break. We're going to help out with what you have."

Brandon P.: I love the message that sends. That is the opposite of an "eat your own" culture, like we've been talking about. That is, "We will support each other, we'll take care of each other." Then, think of it from the perspective as a supervisor—I want healthy cops, because healthy cops are going to do a far superior job in the community than someone who's struggling, who never gets to get away. The people who can never get away and don't feel supported, eventually they're going to resent the organization. What kind of degree of quality of service are they giving to an organization that they resent? I love the support that people—especially as a sergeant, you can absolutely get people to show support for one another. Love that.

Matt F.: Brandon, absolutely. What was amazing about that is sitting at that front table and just watching the team start to build, watching the team components just rise up. It was just, "Hey, we've got this. We're working as a unit." We talk a lot about family within law enforcement. You were seeing components of that, of "No, we're going to get you going. We've got you. Come back even healthier, happier."

You're interested in who they are as a human being, too. To see his positive response off of that, and to see the rest of the people in the room's positive response off of that and the way they came together as a team you, you start off—that was pretty early on in that year. It was, I think the first two weeks of the squad being together. From there forward, we had a combined team, not only of that squad, but everybody in that room worked as a team.

Brandon P.: Well, you're lucky you got him back at all.

Matt F.: Right? I'm telling you, when he bought his photos in, we spent 15 minutes just sharing his photos because we wanted to have that overall connection to the team. "Hey, this is what you all helped me do." Then, you should have seen, it was like, they couldn't run out fast enough to go do the work that we had to do because they were all motivated and they were all joined together just from something that's simple. Just that moment in time to say, "Hey, let's do this differently. Let's change this culture for you as an individual and as everyone in this room."

Brandon P.: Awesome. Speaking of that culture, we talked about how you make the change, but what responsibility do you have as a supervisor to try and impact your culture for the better, have a positive influence on your culture?

Matt F.: I believe there's a responsibility. I believe that's what your role is. I believe that, of course you're supervising the incidents, the calls for service, the phone calls, the complaints, all the other components that we do as supervisors. But the one thing that you've been given a role to do, you were promoted to do, was to look after your personnel, to look after your team. That's not in the way—that it's look after and ignore things. It's to really look at it and be a strong resource, a strong hub. I've always said, Brandon, when you're given discipline as a supervisor, hopefully, you're looking at it as that's a chance for your officer to learn. Hopefully, there's been enough communication up to that point. You talk from a wellness standpoint—there's been enough communication up to that point to where it's not dropping a surprise on them. Then you approach it from a healthy—

Brandon P.: Yup, there's an opportunity there to strengthen a relationship, even through the corrective action.

Matt F.: That's what families do. That's what a mother or father does with their son, or brothers do with their siblings, sisters do with their siblings, friends do with friends. I think that's a real strong learning component within that structure that we can use is saying, "Hey, this is a learning moment." I think, as supervisors, we're holding the key to the ability to have a lot of learning moments.

Brandon P.: I agree. In fact, I've got to tell you a story I just read yesterday in a book. I think it goes right along with this.

Matt F.: Excellent.

Brandon P.: The story, it's about being at peace and being able to be at peace and the importance of responding. How we respond to things as supervisors is very important, I believe, and obviously from what you've been saying, I understand you agree. The author was talking about—as a young boy, had grown up on this farm in New York. They loved living there, but they grew up very poor because it was only ten acres. Father could've managed a much larger piece of land, but they'd chosen to stay there and really had to make ends meet, as it were. Their only vehicle for years and years was this old pickup truck. When he turns 16 years old, so his family gets a new car. It's used, but it took

a significant degree of sacrifice for them to be able to purchase this car. The boy is going to go into town to run some errands and his father lets him take the new car. He goes out, turns the car on. He's excited to drive into town and realizes he forgot his wallet. He runs into the house to grab his wallet. He comes back out—car's gone. He has this panic moment where he realizes he didn't put the car in park. He runs up—they lived right on the shores of a river, and sure enough, there were fresh tire tracks go right down to the river. He sprints over to the edge and sees the headlights going down into the river.

Matt F.: Oh, come on.

Brandon P.: He obviously is in a certain degree of distress now that he has to go and tell his dad what happened. He goes into the house, has to take this big breath, and he sees his father sitting in his favorite chair, reading the newspaper. He said he actually had the thought—he's just going to run away. He's not going to deal with it. He can't tell his dad what happened. He says, his dad, without looking for the newspaper, said, "Did you forget something else?" So now, dad knows he's in the house. He chokes back, takes a big breath, gets the courage, and tells dad the car's in the river.

He's looking at his father, and he says the next response seared itself in his memory. He said his father reached up, turn the other page of the newspaper, and then said to him, "Well, I guess, you better take the truck then."

Matt F.: Wow. That is powerful.

Brandon P.: What I took from that is the father is in control of his emotions rather than just responding. He's the one in control. He realizes the value of the relationship. He knows that his son is probably the least likely individual to ever put a car back in the river again, that he's learned his lesson, and that, while corrective measures will be necessary, a lecture right in that moment of time is only going to cause more pain to somebody who's already hurting and has already learned their lesson.

Matt F.: Obviously.

Brandon P.: The value of that experience to grow the relationship with the son, I think, far exceeded the value of any car, because that is something that is enduring. I think that's the opportunity we have as leaders, is to have an enduring impact rather than just respond with emotion. Think, pause—our responses are important.

Matt F.: Absolutely. You can give your employee just some space, some time, like you just said, like that story just as mentioned—is to just give them a little bit of time and space. I always try to offer—think about the stress that that person’s going through, think about their wellness that they’re going through in that moment. Look at that entirety. Once again, you’re going to have an incident that may occur, something you may need to deal with, but there’s still, once again, that human component involved with that, and that person’s navigating all of that during that time too. Plus, there’s a large unknown, as you just stated with an example, on what the reaction’s going to be.

They’re set up for—thinking of, “This might be very, very bad. This might hurt, this might go very negative.” Well, how do you steer that? Even if there is a component to where—okay, there is going to be some actual or structural discipline applied, really highlight that learning moment, those components.

Brandon P.: Yeah. There’s an opportunity. With every corrective action, there’s an opportunity to grow and learn and create a relationship there.

Matt F.: That’s a huge wellness piece. When dad turned the page, that’s, as a leader, saying, “Okay, we’re on to the next one.” That’s the message that is a healthy thing to say, “We understand.”

Brandon P.: Avoid the knee-jerk reaction. “How do I need to respond to this?”

Matt F.: Absolutely, yes. Take a step back.

Brandon P.: Another thing I think is important as supervisors, I love the message “Your name is safe with me.” We don’t bash employees to other employees ever. By not doing that, not only are we showing the person their name is safe with them, but that person trusts us because they’ve never heard us bash other people to them, so they know we’re not going to take their name and bash it to other people.

Matt F.: Oh, I absolutely. Think about that, Brandon—how do you expect anyone to trust you or build a trustful environment if that’s what you do? You’re sending the message that, even as a defined leader, the person that you’re really steering those ships, you can’t be trusted if you do that. You’ve just set your culture when you do that. The moment that you talk about someone else’s experiences that they shared with you behind their back in that mannerism, you’ve just created a toxic cultural environment by that moment.

Brandon P.: Yes. And that is contagious. Just as a healthy attitude is contagious, the negative side is just as contagious. You're either contributing to the negative culture or you're contributing to a positive culture. Rarely is there a middle ground of no action. It brings me to the question I want to ask: how do you analyze your own leadership? How do you make sure that you are someone who's approachable, that your people can come to, and that your people can trust? Because a leader who is trusted is going to have a far more powerful impact on the organization than one that isn't.

Matt F.: I couldn't agree more with you, Brandon. For me, at work, it really was about asking for input. I couldn't be afraid of input. I couldn't be afraid to say, "Hey, Sarge, I would have handled this incident differently. Or did you look at these other options?" I didn't want to set a tone to say that—after critical incident debriefing, those were huge for me to just build trust and transparency, to just put myself out there right away. Then, Brandon, I'd find during incidents as they were evolving, as they were ongoing, I would have personnel at the right times, at the right moments come up to me and make suggestions, or make suggestions on the air because they had the confidence that I wasn't going to bash them.

Brandon P.: That is valuable.

Matt F.: Yeah. Yup.

Brandon P.: Well, and then, because I'm a big believer that if you're the type of leader that people are afraid to approach, you're alone with your own ideas. That's a dangerous place to be.

Matt F.: Very, very.

Brandon P.: The people we lead, they're closer to the work than we are. They're going to have insight that we don't have. They're going to have exposure and ideas—that we don't know everything. We don't always have to agree with them and they may not always be right, but as long as they're coming to us at the appropriate time with a suggestion or idea, we can learn from that, and it makes us a better leader.

Matt F.: Well, so it's really those progressive leadership tools to say that. Something you just said is so important: you don't know everything, and you're not necessarily the one involved with that. If you're on an incident, you have a rifle operator—ask the rifle operator what their input is and what is going on. We know that no matter whether it's

tactical, no matter whether it's any sort of a response within this job, it's going to change.

Brandon P.: Yes, it will.

Matt F.: Right? Are you building a team? Are you building people that know that they are empowered, that they have a role, an important role, an integral role on your team and other teams—cross teams. When you're on a major incident or different incidents, you're going to go to different squads, personnel. You're going to work together. And you talked about permeating—that's a chance where you have to permeate that. When you're looking at your circle and what you're working on within your circle and then you have your officer going to work with someone else from another squad—that maybe they're having some issues, maybe they don't have necessarily the same type of culture you're having, you just created an ambassador of changing that culture within your office. They're going to have a different interaction within that call.

Brandon P.: That is your legacy.

Matt F.: Yes.

Brandon P.: Is to lead individuals who also help improve the culture. To me, that's a successful leader who has prepared others to positively impact the culture after them and to lead.

Matt F.: You know the greatest feeling I get, Brandon, from the work I was able to do? Is that I still get phone calls from every role level—officer to chief's office—to just actually still reach out to me and share things with me, bounce things off me. That's my legacy.

Brandon P.: That's something to be proud of.

Matt F.: Brandon, look at each and every interaction that you have with your personnel, and if you're setting a different culture, if you're having different communication, if you're building that trust and respect with them, and we just hit on it, to where they're going to other calls with other personnel, with other incidents, they're going to be promoted. They're going to be given different assignments. Whether they say it to you or not, that isn't the focus. It's just—if you're able to see that change in them, if they're taking it forward, that's how you can permeate that overall cultural change. That's how you can have different areas of your agency start to change. They're going to look at the positives and they're going to take that forward.

- Brandon P.: What I like about that message is you've got individuals who—because the success is institutionalized within that organization, the influence of the leader is starting to become communicable, let's say. Now, we know we don't all of us always work for the same organization, at the same agency for our entire career. Then we can have individuals who are emulating the success of that leader, separating themselves, going maybe to another agency and influencing the culture of success in that agency, which then can influence other individuals. Who knows how far that kind of reach and influence could go?
- Matt F.: Absolutely. That's it. I think that's really the key to leadership. I think you and I could probably go through a list of leaders and coaches and people that you and I use as mentors and examples and through our careers too, and it really comes down to—
- Brandon P.: Good and bad.
- Matt F.: Good and bad, but that trust and respect is what really resonates for the ones that were good, that were positive. The strength, what you just said too, is to take what you learned from the ones that were bad. There's so much strength to say—maybe you didn't like a specific leader and their leadership style. Well, why? What were they doing? Then when you get your circle, your environment—
- Brandon P.: You can learn just as much from that.
- Matt F.: Absolutely. That's also something that other people have experienced too, so they'll appreciate it when they see that change. Okay, this is a different environment than that.
- Brandon P.: Well, you know what? I think that is just about as good a place to end as any. Thank you very much, Matthew, for spending time with me today. I appreciate it. You've definitely given me some stuff to think about, and I appreciate that.
- Matt F.: All right. Absolutely, appreciate it.
- Brandon P.: I encourage our listeners to visit the SAFLEO website. That's www.S-A-F-L-E-O.org, for more information not only about this topic but other officer wellness topics. So, for all our listeners, be well and stay safe out there. Thank you.
- Speaker 1: The SAFLEO Program is dedicated to providing training, technical assistance, and resources to law enforcement agencies, staff, and

families to raise awareness, smash the stigma, and reduce and prevent law enforcement suicide. For additional information regarding the SAFLEO Program, please visit safleo.org. That's S-A-F-L-E-O.org. Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

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