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Recognition of Our Civilian Emergency and First Responders for Their Service

By

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We honor our military and so should it be. These military members engage with those whose compulsion to kill or control others remains stronger than a civilized approach to differences. They work in all weather, all conditions, facing not only human enemies of civilized society, but the threat of harm from technology, weapons, and other violence. They work nights, holidays and in weather others avoid. They are away from loved ones, those feelings never diminishing, because of duty responsibilities.

Civilian emergency service workers also have a daily concern for their safety and survival, while enduring action that could lead to injury, disability, and death. Where others fear to tread, they overcome, persist and often rush to danger, as they are the civilian warrior class we must maintain.

They represent a group of dedicated individuals, who regardless of the naysayers and predators give the same level of heart and soul, expertise, and service as that of our national military members. Many serve in both roles, distinguished for whom they are, their values, and their commitment. This group consists of America's "Urban Warriors"; emergency and first responders, represented by Police, Sheriffs, Fire, EMT, Hazardous Materials, Corrections, Game Wardens, Sea and Shore Wardens, and other emergency services. Their professional commitment society to depend on their expertise when harm or chaotic events occur. I acknowledge their code of honor, their commitment, the endurance of things that others flee from and their role in our society.

There are some who chastise them, threaten and make statements based on their philosophy, special interest or selfish ignorance. Many people owe their lives to these individuals. They respond at all hours of the day and night, in all types of weather and environment and face multiple threats. They respond to danger, and when others flee, this unique group of men and women push forward into the harm.

Criticism is all too easy when mindless acquiescence leads the agenda driven by those whose reality tells them that crime, social disorder, non-participatory engagement is all right. Where "self" is prominent, and concern for others may not exist. In a civilized society, it is not okay!

The groups who chant and shout mantras and slogans that are but broad-brush labels easy to accept; unless you dig into the details and the facts, the truth remains silent. As with all groups, some individuals do wrong in casual and harmful ways. However, we

should not condemn those who seek to correct the wrongs by using methods that some polarize, as it does not heal differences.

Rather, we should engage in a process that overcomes future activity of this type. Excuse seeks to cover awareness of wrongdoing, but in that process lie the seeds of destruction. Not only harm to property, but to right and wrong, referencing a collapsing society led by a differentiation of principles that float to the surface, prompted by some idealism that separates contribution from demand. A twisted belief that says, "I steal, I disrupt, I accuse as it is owed to me and someone else can pay." This misconception is not lost to those who do pay the attendant costs.

Our professional emergency service workers are not there to be selective; rather it is a duty to respond and react to all circumstances. Do we not seek quality of life for all? That statement, if true, requires an "all hands" approach, not one-sided and filled with expectation and demand. When we do not contribute to problem-solving, we are often the cause of continuing issues.

When grievance emerges, it is not solved by separation and polarization. Seeking solutions requires face-to-face collaboration and problem-solving. The marching and sometimes disruptive or destructive examples widen the gap of sustainable change separation; it becomes confrontation, and that never works. We either adopt a solutions approach, or we act on hidden agendas that exacerbate the situation, one often fraught with hidden motivation. We can fix each issue without additional harm if that is the actual goal. If that is not the goal, then the events that follow achieve the intended outcome, minus a solution.

So it is with a diminished ability to convey the full magnitude of how I feel and think that this post attempts to honor the men and women whose life and the job often supersede all other aspects of their life. It is sad indeed to believe that we cannot make positive changes rather than a deaf demand for revolution without the requisite engagement of a positive nature. Hidden agendas and personal gain frequently motivate negative behavior, but correspondingly result in harmful outcomes. Is that how we visualize society? One would hope not!

As we honor our military, so too should we recognize the daily sacrifice by members of our civilian services, those who respond to thousands of 911 calls, which for some may result in not returning home at the end of the day. Their accumulating stress, adversity, and trauma are unknown to the rest of society, which, if were it, many would flee to safer places, or at least offer a silent prayer for those who serve in their many capacities.

As with the military, so too should society recognize the service, contribution and the "all too frequent sacrifice," not for personal gain, but to provide society rescue, address bodily harm, and approach danger with courage that may not exist in those who witness their behavior. Their service commitment is exemplary when we see the whole picture. The good they do eliminates negative examples, and it is that remarkable outcome that defines them, not the substantially fewer wrongdoings. Focus on rare cases of

wrongdoing to allow exploitation, never reaches the level of sustainable change. We make those choices; how we do, that is critical.

I recognize your sacrifice, the grit with which you push forward in the face of adversity, and even though you have endured threat, harm and faced death, you did not deter from the oath and obligations you swore to uphold. When others who feel no such dedication to duty, right or wrong and whose self-absorbed focus reduces potential and acts less stellar; keep your attitude rightly placed, remain strong and endure. Stand tall; more support you than not, a substantially large number I suspect!

The following is from a book that Ronald Breazeale (Clinical Psychologist) and I wrote as a peer coaching manual addressing resilience building¹. The sub-title, “Assisting others to acquire and sustain positive change and overcome the effects of stress, adversity, and trauma (2013: 7-8).” The following section is appropriate to this discussion, as it provides insight into the experiences of first responders encounter and lists some of the factors to increase resilience.

Why Should We Teach/Coach Others In Building Resilience?

The experts tell us that there will be another 911-like event sometime shortly. It does not matter, they say, it is not if, but when. Some countries have developed fairly elaborate programs in assessment and training in resilience. They have defined resilience both as the resistance of the citizenry of their country as well as the infrastructure. Unfortunately, many of us in the U.S. have slipped back into believing that there will not be another 911.

Whether we think that there will be another 911- as an event, we would all agree that there will be natural disasters and probably no shortage of them, given the predicted climate changes that are occurring. Hurricanes, ice storms, floods, and tornados are expected to be more frequent in the immediate future. Moreover, there are, of course, other threats that loom on the horizon such as a pandemic, bird flu or the California earthquake, the big one.

Perhaps you are saying; *I have never been affected that much by a natural disaster in my life and probably will not be.* Similar statements may be true for many of us. However, life has no shortage of personal catastrophes. Death and taxes come to us all. We are living longer, but because of our longer lives, we are more susceptible to health problems and crises.

We know that the skills and concepts developed through research on resilience can be learned and applied and can assist individuals in being more able to adapt to and survive difficult times. Training in resilience may reduce the frequency and intensity of post-traumatic stress disorders and other health problems that occur after a national or a personal disaster. Such training may allow our society and the individuals and families affected directly to recover more quickly and comprehensively. Just as we know

¹. Breazeale, R., & Lumb, R. (2013). Resilience Building: Peer Coaching Manual. Amazon.com

that reinforcing a bridge may make it stronger and less likely to be washed away by a flood, we are aware that strengthening an individual's coping skills, their resilience can make it less likely that they will be overwhelmed, washed away, in the same flood.

We also know that people who cannot deal with their emotions, specifically fear, may become more narrow, exclusive, and rigid in their view of the world and less able to see the bigger picture. This "circle-the-wagon" mentality can increase the level of paranoia in a society and result in the rejection and persecution of those who are different from the mainstream by their religion, race, sexual preference or physical or mental ability. Witness our society's reaction to these groups during the years since 9/11. Reacting out of emotion rather than thought and rational problem-solving can result in decisions made through fear that negatively affect the entire society and later regretted when we think carefully about them. Defending our society and our culture can be inclusive rather than exclusive involving the seeking of alliances, cooperative problem-solving and consensus regarding the actions taken.

We should all have an investment in building our resilience and in supporting the building of resilience of our family members, friends, and all members of our society since we are all in this together.

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What Factors Make For Resilient People?

We know that individuals handle adversity in many different ways and the various approaches and strategies they have learned; shaped the culture, society, and family systems, they understand. However, some common factors emerge.

1. Being connected to others.

Relationships that can provide support and care are one of the primary factors in resilience. Having some these relationships, both within and outside of the family, that offer

love, encouragement, and reassurance can build and support resilience (e.g., developing new friendships).

2. Being flexible. By definition, it is an essential component of resilience and one of the primary factors in emotional adjustment and maturity. Requirements for the individual include flexible thinking and actions, such as trying some new endeavor.

3. Being able to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out.

Being able to see what is rather than what you would like is part of this skill. Being proactive rather reactive, assertive rather than aggressive or passive are all components of this ability, e.g., taking a Red Cross course in CPR and First Aid.

4. Being able to communicate well and problem-solve both individually and with others. Included is essential communication, listening, and problem-solving skills, e.g., working as a team member within your community.

5. Being able to manage strong feelings. Requires being able to take action without being impulsive and responding emotionally and able to engage in clear thinking and action. Being able to use thinking as a way of managing one's emotions is a fundamental component of this skill, e.g., when you're angry or hurt, thinking before acting.

6. Being self-confident. Having a positive self-image is critical if a person is to be able to confront and manage fear and anxiety in his/her life, e.g., helping someone else.

7. Being able to find purpose and meaning. Being able to make sense out of what is happening and to find meaning in it is critical if one is to be able to manage the feelings aroused in a crisis. Spiritual and religious practices are often a component of this factor, e.g., acting on your values.

8. Being able to see the big picture. This factor is often closely aligned with #7 and #5. Optimists, in general, are better able to see the bigger picture than pessimists. They are more likely to see good and bad events occurring in their life being temporary rather than permanent. This internal view of life will pass. They are also more liable to see events having a particular impact on individual areas of their life rather than having a pervasive impact on their entire life or their future. Moreover, last, of all, they are less likely to blame themselves or someone else for the hard times. Optimists avoid the blame game, e.g., hold yourself and others accountable without blaming.

Factors of Resilient People

- 1. Connected to others**
- 2. Flexible**
- 3. Make realistic plans and take action to carry them out**
- 4. Communicate well and problem-solve both individually and with others.**
- 5. Manage strong feelings**
- 6. Self-confident**
- 7. Find purpose and meaning.**
- 8. See the big picture**