



# THE REVIEW

Central Arizona Fire and Medical - 8603 E. Eastridge Dr., Prescott Valley, AZ 86314 – **June 21, 2024**

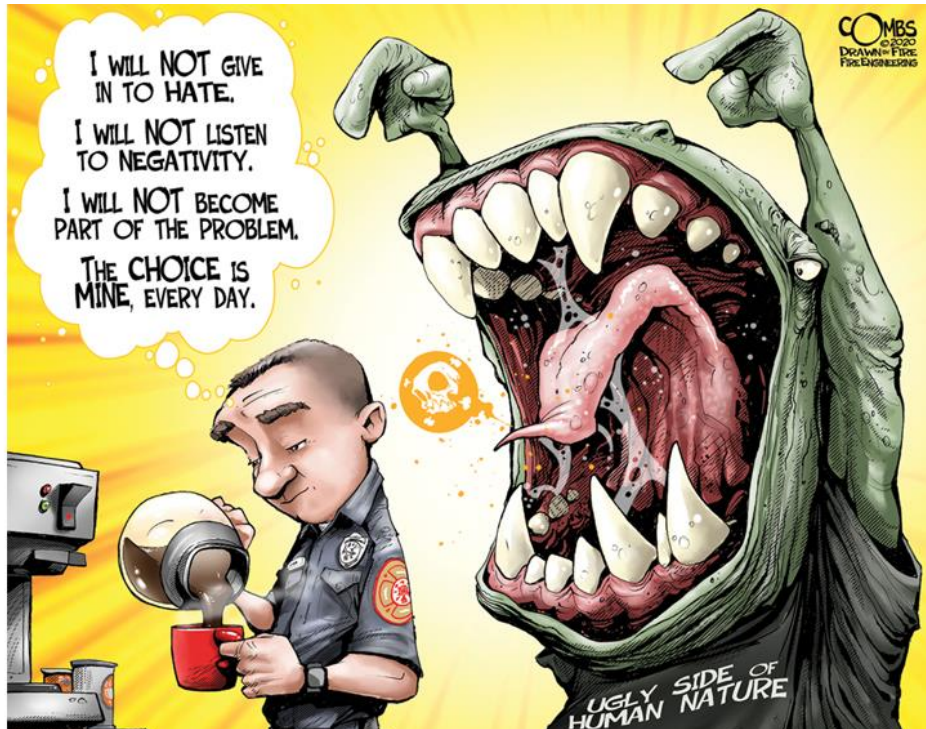
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Have a Great Weekend!

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” – Viktor Frankl

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## The Assistant Chief's Desk

I have been a passionate advocate for mental health and wellness for quite a while now. In my past experience I've been fortunate to be involved in creating and deploying first-responder mental health and wellness programs as well as helping to stand up peer support teams. But, to this point everything I've been involved with has been reactive. I've never seen much in the way of proactive training that teaches us how to deal with trauma and its effects. Well, at least not until recently.

Awhile back, I had the opportunity to attend a five-day Struggle Well class. I had heard of Struggle Well and the Boulder Crest Foundation in passing but really didn't know much about them or the class. This class was attended by law enforcement and fire personnel as well as mental health professionals from around the Prescott area. And, I have to admit they changed my perspective on mental health. I left the program feeling like I had finally been given practices that I could use to deal with "struggle". I also left the program with a different take on "struggle". The program was significantly different than any type of training I have ever been to regarding mental health and wellness.

I've been fortunate to have a long career in fire and EMS. February of this year marks my 32<sup>nd</sup> year on the job. Like many of us who have been on the job a while, I have experienced my share of ups and downs both personally and professionally. Many of these "downs" have left their mark. Like most of us I have a "bag of rocks" that I carry with me. These "rocks" are the aftereffects of various calls from over the years as well as personal traumas like the loss of close friends and family that I have experienced outside the job. You know what your rocks are because we all carry our unique ones.

The difference here is that Struggle Well teaches you how to put the rocks down and not pick them back up by showing you how to learn from trauma and not just to recover from it, but rather to thrive after it. Struggle Well is predicated on the idea that every worthwhile thing in life lies on the other side of "struggle". Whether its surviving and thriving after traumatic events or something as simple as making lifestyle changes to achieve something bigger, nothing worthwhile in life occurs without some type of sacrifice or effort i.e., "struggle". Quite simply, without effort and sacrifice, nothing of value can be accomplished. The program teaches you to view struggle through this lens. It was said in the class that "struggle is a terrible thing to waste".

Boulder Crest was founded by two men, Josh Goldberg, and Ken Falke, who had a passion for helping military veterans and first responders. They both felt that there had to be something out there that could actually help veterans and first responders recover and thrive after trauma, and they were determined to find it. This search led the to the research on, and science of "Post Traumatic Growth". Their focus is on changing the discussion from Post Traumatic Stress to that of Post Traumatic Growth. "Post Traumatic Growth (PTG) is a positive psychological transformation that can happen after trauma.

### Board Meetings:

June 24<sup>th</sup>  
CYFD and CVFD 16:15  
(Joint Meeting)  
CAFMA 17:00

The science of PTG demonstrates that when we're forced to reflect on our lives and make sense of the destruction caused by trauma, our struggles can become a catalyst for change. Trauma does not have to be the end of the road, rather it can be the path to a new beginning." (What is Post Traumatic Growth, n.d.) By exploring and applying Dr. Richard Tedeschi's research on Post Traumatic Growth and studying Prisoners of War who had been interned in the "Hanoi Hilton" in Viet Nam they began to understand that trauma could become a powerful force for growth. Rather than being "victims" of trauma they found that you could become stronger because of it.

In studying prisoners of war from the Viet Nam conflict it was found that the average rate of PTSD in soldiers in the conflict was around 30%, but in pilots that had been POWs for years in the brutal and torturous conditions in the Hoa Loa (Hanoi Hilton) prison the PTSD rate was less than 4%. How could this be so? This resulted from the POWs finding an adaptive meaning to their suffering. The POWs found ways to appreciate their lives, to relate to and support one another and help each other through their guilt and shame. They realized that their struggle held purpose and potential and they learned to grow from it rather than be "victimized" by it. And even more remarkable is the fact that they discovered this while enduring the trauma of living in horrid conditions and being subjected to regular torture and abuse.

The result of this research and study was the creation of programs to teach veterans and first responders just how to accomplish this. Programs like Struggle Well are the result. Rather than just adapting to the new normal after experiencing trauma, Struggle Well teaches you how to meet the challenge head on and learn from it and grow rather than being victimized. The end result is not just recovery or adaptation but instead learning to thrive and live better than before. It's hard to appreciate unless you've had the chance to experience it. Like I mentioned before this isn't reactionary. It's not counseling or defusing, rather this is learning new practices to confront trauma head on and use it for a purpose rather than to just get through it. It's also not a magic fix, like any other endeavor there is effort required. However, if you make the effort to apply the practices taught, you will experience post traumatic growth rather than victimhood. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the program.

I believe in the program and the organization is supportive of it as well. We are working on a schedule where we would bring Struggle Well classes to the area each quarter. These classes would be open to our members as well as other first responders from the area at no cost.

If you're interested in learning more about Struggle Well or post traumatic growth, check out [bouldercrest.org](http://bouldercrest.org). If you'd like to hear about my own experience, feel free to reach out. Information on the classes will be available soon.