

Prepare to Respond Off Duty



VALOR THRIVE Webcast Transcript

Floyd W.: Hello, I'm Floyd Wiley. I'm a program lead with the Bureau of Justice Assistance VALOR Program. Thank you for joining us for our first THRIVE webcast, Preparing to Respond Off Duty. Today's episode focuses on the importance of being prepared when you're off duty responding to a critical true emergency incident. Now, during today's THRIVE webcasts and future editions, I want to level set just a little bit and let you guys know that we really encourage you to use our chat feature during the session. I have Chief John Bouthilette from South River, New Jersey. He's retired, and he's going to be working on the monitoring of that chat feature. He's one of our leads as well from the VALOR Program. So, please feel free to interact with us for maximum information uptake. This is going to be a very important session today, as they all are, so lock in.

Now, today we're featuring two very, very special guys—Sergeant Scott Angulo of Tallahassee, Florida, Police Department and Officer George Mussini of the Baltimore, Maryland, Police Department. Both of these gentlemen have been involved in critical true emergencies, off-duty incidents, and they will share their experiences and their thoughts about being prepared for that day off duty when an encounter may come your way. And listen, we cannot pick the event, the event picks us. So, when we can't avoid it, those folks are going to give you some tips on how to prepare for that. Now, I'll tell you, both of these guys are very humble when discussing these incidents, and I'm going to put them out there a little bit. For their actions, they both received high honors in saving lives and stopping the carnage. George received the Medal of Honor in 2016 for the Baltimore County Police Department, and Scott received the Congressional Badge of Bravery along with many others, and I commend them as well. They're really rock-solid guys. But I'll tell you, both of these guys wish that that day didn't come, but it did.

Now, hopefully you're familiar with their stories through Scott's eLearning piece that we have online. It's an eLearning module, "Duty Ready: Preparing to Respond Off Duty." And George has a podcast we did together, "When Work Follows You Home." Now, if you haven't seen that, I encourage you to check those products out ASAP on the website after this podcast. It covers some other crucial dynamics of the incidents they were involved in that you can learn from and the aftermath and self-care and family-care. It's really riveting, and it's extremely educational. If you haven't seen it, you need to make sure you check it out. So, Scott and George, before we get into mindset and preparedness, when we're preparing to respond to an off-duty incident—for our audience, I want to frame out the levels of intervention and the scale of urgency during an off-duty encounter and get your input. Because, you know, normally we try to avoid, evade, and, you know, counter the incident, but we want to be a best witness. So, I want to break it down to three components. Let's talk about noncritical incidents. George, let me have you expand a little bit on that. How do you respond if you're off duty with noncritical incidents?

George M.: Well, that's the first thing you have to decide before you even leave your house: if you're going to be a good witness that day, or if you're going to be ready to rock and roll, if necessary. But if it's a low-level incident, if it's a shoplifting, something that a patrol unit can handle, that's when you want to pick up the phone rather than interjecting yourself. No sense in exposing yourself to danger or liability.

Floyd W.: Right, and so, Scott, what about a high-threat situation? You know, the high-threat situation might come in contact with—someone's casing a location. You might hear folks, you know, look like they're about to rumble. And then someone's talking about, "I got my gun in the car," you know, how do you focus and deal with that?

Scott A.: Typically, the high-threat situations like that, you know, it's not an imminent threat, it's just a high threat.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: I'd say you'd probably want to be the best witness you can be, you know, take a tactical position, you know, protect yourself, do what you can to try to remove bystanders from the area, get some other innocents out of the way, be ready to take action in case it escalates, but you're really acting behind, you know, you're behind the curve, so to speak, in these events. You are off duty. Typically, you know, we're talking about off duty here. So, you're not going to have your insignia on and that kind of stuff. They're not going to who you are, why you're trying to interject yourself into this situation. So, you really could make things worse, especially for yourself or—you know, heaven forbid—your family is with you.

Floyd W.: Exactly. And we're not even, you know—we gotta think about. There could be additional assailants. We're talking about blue-on-blue. We're talking about, like, a myriad of issues that could be detrimental by getting involved. George, do you have any comments on that high threat?

George M.: We have this complex, where we all think that everybody knows we're a cop, you know, but responding officers may not know that you're an officer. So, you really have to be mindful about your preparation and, you know, how you're going to present yourself, how you're going to respond to them. And I'm sure we're going to dive deeper into that. But, you know, don't automatically assume that everybody that's responding is going to know who you are, especially when you're out of jurisdiction. You know, because I was nobody when I was out of jurisdiction.

Floyd W.: Right, right, and you know what else happens? I think that when you're in a high-threat situation—I want you guys to kind of touch on this—is, like, when you see this thing starting to elevate, controlling your emotions.

Scott A.: Yes.

Floyd W.: So, what do you think about that, Scott? I mean, you know, how do you start to bring it down just a little bit to understand what your role is off duty?

Scott A.: At that point, there's no imminent threat. We just, you know, like you said, try to stay calm, try to stay out of it if you can, you know, like I said before, be the best witness. Try not to let your emotions get in, you know, "I'm the police, I gotta do something." If you're off duty, you know—just trying to remember that, you know, like we talked about. There's too much that can go wrong if you're not insignia'd out. You don't have your radio to communicate for backup, you know, get on the phone, start getting people coming to you in case it escalates. But you know, there again, I can't say it enough, be the best witness you can be at that point.

Floyd W.: Right, so now we've looked at the noncritical. We talked about the high threat, and now we're talking about that critical, true emergency, which both of you were involved in that intervention where you had to stop people from being killed or seriously injured, and you had to make that decision. And unfortunately, in law enforcement, you know, training, off-duty training or working undercover—we don't do enough training. And we need to plug into that equation, especially with the current threat environment. I think it's extremely important.

So, let's talk about—let's move into mindset. Now, you both had to go from, you know—when we talked about color codes of readiness, you know, both of you guys came from white or yellow color codes of awareness, you know. George, you were in a situation—you were in yellow, you were in condition yellow going through the Union Station in Washington, DC, with a friend who was not a law enforcement officer, and that's when you got picked for the incident. Scott, you were in, probably, what? Correct me if I'm wrong, you were in condition white, you were at your house getting ready to go to work, and then all of a sudden, you know, shots are fired, police cars going by, the house is on fire, and unfortunately, you know, there was an officer down, and then you had to go ahead and do work, and your family had to get rushed into the bathroom. So, kinda explain, George, where was your mindset? And how did you go from—go to switched on during that period when everything collapsed in on you?

George M.: Well, first, you gotta be left of bang before you leave the house, you know. Like I mentioned before, you've gotta be ready. Here's the thing—we have to have an off switch. We have to be able to

disconnect from the job when we're not in uniform or we're not actually on duty, but you still also have to be prepared. And honestly, like you said, Floyd, I was off duty. I was out of jurisdiction. I was with a neighbor, but fortunately, I had my off-duty weapon with me. If I didn't, there's a pretty good chance I wouldn't be on this call right now because the subject had a large butcher knife, and it was me and him, and the people he had already stabbed in the train station. So, like you said, Floyd, you don't always get to pick the situation. The situation picks you. But what I want to drive home right now is that if a situation picks you, are you going to be ready? Is your weapon ready? Are you tapped off? Is your slide oiled? You know, do you have your identification? There's a million things we can dive into, but be ready when you leave your house. And sometimes, like, what Scott's situation is, he didn't even get to leave his house because it came to his house.

Floyd W.: Exactly. Yeah, that was absolutely crazy. So, now let's talk about this though. Let's move into sensory distortion and time distortion, and how do you prepare for that? I'm going to direct that to George.

Scott A.: Okay.

George M.: Alright. Well, sensory distortion—we all heard of a tunnel vision, right? Where you're focused in on thing. My situation, I'm in a train station, and even though there were other people around, when it came down to focus time, it was me and him. I didn't see the other bystanders. I didn't see the other witnesses. I couldn't hear anything. I was perceiving that he was saying things to me that may, or he may or may not have been saying, but your—your adrenaline dumps out. You're—you get some auditory exclusion. This is normal stuff that people can experience.

Floyd W.: Right.

George M.: Not everybody experiences it because we all process things differently. But these are things to definitely take in effect, into account when you're on a scene, is that you're going to be really, really dialed in. And then, at some point, the sound's going to come back on, reality is going to slap you in the face, and you've got to be ready to address, you

know, the officers that come on scene. Floyd, you saw my video. Within three seconds of me pulling the trigger on my final shot, we had a blue-on-blue situation where I had to be ready to surrender and present my ID.

Floyd W.: Right. Right. And I want to come back to that too because I want to specifically break that down just a little bit. Scott, now you had to switch on from like zero to go. And so, you were in condition white, and then all of a sudden, it's on. So, what was your mindset, and what was going on in your headspace when all that stuff jumped off?

Scott A.: Well, like you said, I was completely condition white just before this happened. I was outside washing my truck, getting ready to go to work. I was having to go to work that night, work a football game. I step inside, my son tells me that, you know, a couple of deputies' cars went up the road. I look outside, didn't look like anything. And then I turned my back, next thing, I hear gunshots—several gunshots. Told my family, "Hey," I told my wife, "Hey, you gotta go into the bathroom. You know, I gotta get going, got to go to work." So, you know, there again, I had to access my gear. You know, I typically put all my stuff in the same place for that, so that I would know how to get it and where to get it. The only thing that was different this time is the day before, I had gone to the range to qualify, and I left my magazines out in the car, but, you know, I had to get it all, the whole time, you know—like George said, adrenaline's going, you know, I kept catching myself, you know, having to slow myself down. At one point, I had to get my rifle out of the safe, that sensory distortion, fine motor skills are gone. I had to push the buttons on my safe to get the gun out, and I missed it the first two times. And I'm thinking to myself, "If I don't get it the third time, I'm not getting my rifle."

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: I had to stop. My training came—you know, my training came back. Stop, take a deep breath, give it a second, which was hard to do because I was still hearing gunshots, and then deliberately push the buttons, get it out. Like George said, again, you know, the tunnel vision, you know, the first time I saw him, I still—to this day when I think back to that, it was just him that I see, and, you know, there

again, the way that you deal with tunnel vision, it's you try to have to force yourself to break that, to look around, to scan, you know, tunnel vision, you're focused on the one threat. There may be other threats. So, you need to scan. The other thing is to do that, you know, that tactical breathing, that combat breathing, the, you know, the slow inhale, hold it, slow exhales as you go. You know, make yourself slow down if you can.

Floyd W.: Right. So, let me ask you this. You know—how did you prepare, you know, for that, you know, what have you done prior or what kind of training did you have prior that you can say to the listeners today helped prepare you for that unscheduled situation that you were faced with, Scott?

Scott A.: I did. Our training section here when I first started always talked about, you know, what-iffing and then later, we morphed that into what-winning to get rid of that. You know, "This may or may not happen," to "This is going to happen," and start thinking things through. So, I did a lot of that kind of stuff. Never did I really ever think anything would come to my house, but it was some of the other stuff.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: And then I did a lot of training on my own time with malfunction drills and, you know, Murphy's law jumped up and got me, and I had two malfunctions in my rifle, you know, before the first shot—actually both of them were before the first shot, both of them failure to feeds before the first shot. And that's when the training just kind of came back in. I knew how to go through the steps to clear it, and, you know, keep going.

Floyd W.: Right. And that didn't magically just happen. That, that came from training. What about you, George?

George M.: Well, that's the thing too. Like, you know, before I trained at the academy, I trained when they offer open range dates, you know, within our agency. I take advantage of that, you know. You got to take care of your equipment so your equipment can take care of you. You

know, you can't rely on the last second to, you know, make sure your gun is clean or oiled or, you know, whatever. So, you know, the mindset has to be there. And like I said, I was saying, it has to be before you leave the house. But Scott's situation proves that you have to have the mindset, even when you're in your house, when your guard is down, you still have to be ready to access your weapon, make sure it's accessible, make sure it's secured, per, you know, policy and safety reasons and everything else like that.

But, you know, I did want to add something here too, you know—when we're carrying off duty and we're talking about mindset, you know, I was at a restaurant prior to my incident, and I had to make a conscious decision, "Am I going to have a drink tonight? Am I not going to have a drink tonight?" Thank God, thank God, I did not drink that night because I can only imagine what would have happened. Had I had alcohol in my system when I was involved in that incident, you know, we have to be very mindful that, you know, we don't become complacent enough to let our guard down, say, "Oh, I'm going to have a couple of drinks, I got my weapon," most laws and most restrictions for agencies prevent that or restrict you from having drinks while having your weapon anyway. Right? So, don't put yourself in a situation for liability and poor judgment and ability because that will, that will take you down. And especially if you don't operate a hundred percent, that's going to come into account.

Floyd W.: That is an excellent point. If you are carrying your weapon, you know, do not have a drink. I mean, it's just that simple. And again, there's policies out there, and on top of that, your judgment is off, and everybody knows that. But I think that really is duly noted. George, I appreciate that. Let me ask you guys about stress inoculation drills. I know if I say we should do vehicle car step validation or hooded box where these things just happen, because, you know, a lot of times we prepare for, I wouldn't say behavioral threat analysis, these pre-assault indicators or these pre-incident indicators, but in your particular cases there, were there any indicators for you guys prior to the incident taking place?

Scott A.: In my incident, the only indication, nothing immediately before it happened, but we did get an intel bulletin about the guy a couple of

days before, but we get so many of them, it was, you know—when this thing first started and kicked off, it took me a second to think back, that, “Hey, that guy in that intel bulletin lives up that way when I’m hearing the gunshots.” But other than that, I mean, the gunshots were, it was go time. There was no time to do anything.

Floyd W.: Yeah, and I think you bring up a good point there, Scott, because a lot of times, we get flooded with intel bulletins, right? And we don’t really realize that that can be a pre-incident indicator. And we sorta get fatigued a little bit by so many things. So, I highly encourage folks to make sure that you are reading them, take some snapshots, whatever the case is. George, any comments on that?

George M.: You know, I didn’t really have too many pre-incident indicators, but I did have to take my environment into account. I was misdirected by GPS into my situation. I was basically put in a place I didn’t belong because my GPS directed me into the backdoor of Union Station. But I noticed that it was poorly lit. I did notice that there were some subjects that had some suspicious behavior. So, I started to raise my awareness level. And even my neighbor asked me, he’s like, “Are you armed?” And I had to have that conversation with my neighbor. And that makes me think of something, Floyd, that, you know, we talk about having our families prepared for off-duty encounters. But sometimes, you have to have the conversation with your friends too, if you’re going to be going out, and you know that you’re going to be carrying, it doesn’t hurt to have a conversation with your family and your friends that, “Hey, if I’m involved in an incident or something pops off, I need you to get on the phone with 9-1-1. I need you to give them the best description of me possible so that they know I’m the good guy versus the bad guy when they arrive on scene,” because that can be life-saving information.

Floyd W.: Exactly.

George M.: That gets relayed. So, a little bit of pre-planning, a little bit of conversation—I mean, we don’t want to ruin our family friendships and our, you know, other things that are going on by making people hypervigilant, but we need to have a mindset and be prepared.

Floyd W.: Right. And let me go back to this because I want to touch on that too, George. When I was trying to get the thought process across on the stress inoculation drills, those present a different type of dynamic for when you don't see a pre-assault indicator and being able to respond like on the actual event, especially as it reveals itself. So, when we talk about the pre-assault indicators or pre-incident indicators, if you're not seeing those behavioral indicators or those clues, or if you're not seeing those biometrics, which are uncontrolled biological responses, you know, such as, you know, someone's neck getting red, or you start to see their extremities get red, or blinking at high frequencies, any of those types of things. If you're not seeing that—I want to say, Scott, would you think that those stress inoculation drills will help you with that, those types of encounters?

Scott A.: You know, they kind of build up, give you a chance to deescalate. Some of them, you step off, and it's time—you know, you see it.

Floyd W.: Right, right.

Scott A.: But we try to, and the ones that build up, we do try to make sure there's enough indicators to kind of start building that left of bang mentality. "Hey, start looking for this," you know. When you start seeing those anomalies, things that are off what normal people do, you know, in those situations, when you start seeing those, you know, start taking some action. Doesn't mean you've got to pop off right away, but start, you know, start putting yourself in a better position, you know—maybe change your tone a little bit, that kind of stuff, you know, start—you gotta start, you know, getting off the X, start moving away, start getting ready.

Floyd W.: And then sometimes, like, both of you, you didn't have any pre-assault indicators. George, I think you said the first thing you saw was someone who had been attacked. Is that correct?

George M.: Yup. The first woman he stabbed in the head came running past me with a trail of blood screaming, and no sooner did we recognize her, you know, as a victim, we turn, and there he is with a butcher knife in the middle of the train station. So, it happens quick. I will say this. When I first laid eyes on him, I thought it was a stupid social

experiment that was going on. I thought, "Who would be dumb enough to do this?"

Floyd W.: How about that?

George M.: I felt myself dismissing the situation. And then, when he challenged me and raised the knife, I was quickly reminded that this was a real situation in that my neighbor and I needed to hit the high ground and get the escalator, you know, to have some kind of advantage and distance on him.

Floyd W.: Right. So, let me switch gears just a little bit, because especially, George, in your situation, what are some appropriate actions for the challenged officer that's being confronted by the confronting officer? What are some of the things and considerations of things? Because I saw your video, but unfortunately our audience can't, are not privy to see that. But what are some of the things that you suggest that an officer who's off duty should do, like, ASAP, when being challenged?

George M.: All right. So, one, uniform always wins. So, if you are in plain clothes, whoever's in uniform is in charge of the scene. So, do not counter, you know, a command. If they tell you, "Get on the ground," get on the ground. Immediately after I discharged my last round, I holstered, I put my hands up. I made sure that my badge was visible, you know. Mind you, I was out for dinner, you know, so I didn't have it around my neck, which is the preferred method when you're off duty, is to have it somewhere high where it can be seen. I had it on my badge, but I'll tell you this, I was doing some hip thrusting, Floyd. I was throwing that badge out there as far as I could, because I did not want a blue-on-blue situation. And, I'll tell you this, I had no idea that it was as close as it was, you know, time-wise from when the last shot went off to when the first officer came on to me. So, I identified myself.

Floyd W.: Yeah, they were on scene incredibly quickly.

George M.: Yes, so hands up, do not make any suspicious movements, do not, just like we would tell, we would expect from a subject we're dealing with on the street. You want them to be fully compliant and be respectful, because they don't know who you are. You know, my neighbor got

proned out just like he was anybody else. And I got patted down, I surrendered my weapon. I was very forthright with my information. Be cooperative.

Floyd W.: Right, and try to resist spinning, you know, face-to-face. I noticed you didn't do any of that towards the officer, you know, identifying yourself loudly. So, I mean, that was a pretty intense situation. And like you said, you know, if you have the ability to place that badge at neck level, there's some eye-tracking data that's out there, and that law enforcement is showing up. They're not really paying attention a lot to the chest area or the waistband areas. It's normally up in that neck area that it actually proves that to identify the officer a whole lot quicker. Scott, you have any input on that?

Scott A.: Well, in this situation, when I came out, I had my vest on.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: And the deputy that was currently engaged in the shoot-out, as I approached him, I put my hands up so that he could clearly see that I was with him.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: You know, that I would have the insignia on and all of that so we didn't engage in a blue-on-blue.

Floyd W.: Can you describe for the audience what you were wearing that day?

Scott A.: Originally, just a red T-shirt and jeans. But when I went out the door, I put on, like—I was in investigations at the time. I put on, like, my raid vest.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: Had the police across the front.

Floyd W.: Okay.

Scott A.: The big letters and stuff, and I had my sidearm on, and then my badge that I typically wore on my belt at the time.

Floyd W.: Right. Right. So, you were able to do some things, you know, as quickly as possible to make sure that you are identifiable. So, you had that—a little bit of a luxury, a little bit.

Scott A.: Yes. Typically, when I would come home, I'd hang it up. I always wore it home. As soon as I'd walk in the house, I would hang it up in the same position so I would always have it in case I had to go out, you know, quickly—never thought in my front yard.

Floyd W.: Which goes back to preparation and mindset.

Scott A.: Yes.

Floyd W.: Right, right. So, let's go into this area. Let's talk about a family plan, and George, in your particular case, a friend plan, when you're out and, you know, perhaps, you know, covert physical or verbal codes. I know I had them with my children. It was like, "Hey, my grandmother's here." And they knew my grandmother was not alive. And they quickly reacted by separating from me. Did you guys do any of that, or what was the plan for you? Or did you do it later? How did that play out for you, George?

George M.: Well, it was no surprise to my neighbor that I was a cop, but having that conversation about me being armed definitely prepared him because he didn't know how he was supposed to react.

Floyd W.: Right.

George M.: You know, sometimes your friend is carrying a pocketknife or something else, or maybe they think that they should jump in and insert themselves in a situation. But you have to let them know, "Listen, just like an air marshal on the plane, they're in charge. You, you let them do the job. Just like you have to let me do my job." You get the distance. And I saw on the chat, you know—we're talking about when we call to identify ourselves to the dispatcher, to let them know I'm a law enforcement officer. "I am armed, I am not armed,"

whatever, because chances are, you're not always going to have your weapon. So, if you identify yourself as a law enforcement officer to dispatch and say if you are armed or not armed, that will help the responding officers decipher whether or not. And one thing I did want to mention real quick about the identification, you know, because we're very prone that, you know—when we're driving home, we see another officer on the side of the road with a traffic stop or something like that, and we may want to jump out and assist if they're in a tussle or something. You gotta be very cautious how you approach that scene. But I don't have a raid jacket or anything, and I don't have a take-home vehicle, but in my car, I carry a reflective vest that says police on it, just in case I ever have to get out and, you know, help a trooper or a fellow officer. It's something that's highly visible. It says police on it so that I can at least try and help without becoming a target myself. So, just small things you can do to help identify yourself. Some people have slings or whatever, but that's the one tool I have. I use it.

Floyd W.: So, and Scott—let me ask you this. Did you have codes with, with your family? Did they know that make sure that they call 9-1-1, separate, you know, give a description of you and so forth and make sure that they don't stay at the scene? Unfortunately, they didn't have any choice in your case, but, that they don't stay at this scene so that they're not, like, a tactical—you don't end up lending yourself to tactically unsound decisions because they're there, in effort to try to protect them.

Scott A.: Right. I didn't really have a code word. We had discussed it. And my fear with the code words is, if you say a code word, it's going to take them a second to try to process it. You know, what does that mean? So, I kind of made it clear with them that if I say, "Hey, walk away from me, I have to go to work." That means walk away. My wife knows, no questions asked, just start walking. We'll hook up later.

Floyd W.: Makes sense.

Scott A.: I'll meet up with you later. And with the kids, typically, if we go somewhere, like, if we go to the fair, I'll give them a rally point. You know, "Hey, if we get separated or if I say I have to go do something,

go away, go hide. We will meet at this position later.” And, or at stores, you know, if I’d say, “Walk away from me,” at a store, you know, there’s somebody there that may be after me, or I may have to do something, you know, go towards the registers, is what I typically tell them, and try to hide until I get there. You know, I saw that Catherine asked the questions about ten and six.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: I had, my youngest was six, my oldest was nine at the time, so—that were home at the time.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: So, it was at that time frame, and we didn’t—that’s all I really had told them at that point, but, you know, it was just, you know, if I say, “I have to go to work,” just kind of walk away, but we got more specific since then.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: As far as what that means.

Floyd W.: What about you, George, you beef that up a little bit too?

George M.: Yes. So, I really like what Scott said about talking in plain language so that they don’t have to decipher what’s going on in an emergency. And I know in the chat there was a concern about how do you talk to your kids or your family, you know, the young ones, how do you breach this topic? There are some books about the sheep and the shepherd, and it talks about how we’re the guardians. And it helps explain, you know, to our children, how sometimes, mom or dad has to go to work, like Scott said, and we have to protect people. So obviously, whenever we communicate with our family, we want to spare them the details of, the gory details, right? But we need to have them at least be aware because you also don’t want to expose your family to unnecessary trauma.

Floyd W.: Right.

George M.: But you can have subtle conversations and, you know, talk to them, explain to them about your job. And sometimes, you know, it can be dangerous work, but I train, and I'm very cautious about what I do, but I also need to protect people. And if I have to protect people, then, like Scott said, find your way to a safe area and do it. But here's the other thing too, having that conversation can always be difficult. And we have access with VALOR and SAFLEO to bring people like Dr. Sobo, who can talk to us about addressing our families. But you also have to be mindful that if you have your little ones with you, that's an extra consideration of whether you're going to engage yourself in that situation or not.

Floyd W.: Yes.

George M.: You know, mindset and making the right decisions is very key to this whole thing.

Floyd W.: Right, and that's why I really encourage our viewers to watch both of your presentations, the podcasts and the eLearning, because you really delve deep into those areas that are extremely important and impactful. So, let me switch gears just a little bit. Let's talk about another thing in mindset and preparation. And that is, did either one of you have, like, your attorney or your counsel on speed dial, your union representative, or anything like that? Because I know in most organizations, you have to give that, you know, public safety statement, right? But after that, did you guys have that already set up?

Scott A.: I did not. It's automatically done. It's part of our notification process here. Somebody will call, you know, all of the command staff people, they'll contact the union representatives and all of that. The state attorney—everybody's notified, there's a whole notification tree that's done.

Floyd W.: Okay.

Scott A.: Automatically, as soon as dispatch is aware, it happens.

Floyd W.: Right. George, what about you?

George: I would agree with Scott—similar process that some of this stuff is, you know, automatic. However, you know, in addition to your attorney, make sure you, you have a, either you have the proper opportunity to communicate with your family about being involved in the situation, and have somebody stand by with your family—especially if you're off duty because, you know, I was out of jurisdiction. I had no idea how many hours or days it was going to be before I could see them again. And I was fortunate enough to have some coworkers that were familiar with my family be on standby with them until I could get back home. And that's very, very key to this off-duty piece.

Floyd W.: I like that. I like that a lot.

Scott A.: Totally agree. I've been around a couple others, and I think it's important that if you're involved in this, that your significant other hears you are okay from you. Take the time to make a call that says, "I'm okay, I've been involved in something. I'll call you later." Don't get into any details because you don't want to drag them into it at that time but let them hear your voice, that you're okay.

Floyd W.: Now, what about protocol for going directly to the hospital to get yourself checked out for, you know, vitals, any physiological changes that happened to you during that incident, adrenaline surging, insulin and dehydration? Did you guys have that put in place?

Scott A.: I did not. I didn't have to do that afterwards.

Floyd W.: George, what about you?

George M.: Well, you know how you said sometimes the situation picks you? I was very blessed. I had been a law enforcement officer for 18 and a half years and never was taught how to respond to being involved in a critical incident, despite the fact that I had been in probably a thousand of them beforehand. But in that class, they said, if you were involved in a critical incident—and by the way, I took this class four days before my shooting after being on the job for almost 19 years there. But they talked about after an incident like this, your adrenaline is going to spike. Listen, our human bodies were prepared to fight,

you know, woolly mammoths or saber-tooth tigers, and when you pull the trigger, you're not using a lot of energy there. So, it's running in your system, that adrenaline. So, one of the best ways to flush it out is lots and lots of water, exercise, you have to give yourself time to decompress. I took a couple of walks in the trails with my wife and my dog while our friends watched our kids. You are going to cycle up. You may experience a range of emotions and physiological responses. I cried after my incident. I didn't feel bad, but I did. It's a human emotion, pretty human here. I was angry. I was mad. I was, you know, I was confident. I went through everything. You know, it's kinda like a functions check. After you go to the range, you take your gun apart, you know, once you get it taken apart. Floyd, I did see some, some comments in the chat about, like, qualified immunity and protections and stuff. If we have time, I can address it.

Floyd W.: Well, you know what? Yeah, let's come back to that in our question and answer portion. But let me just hit on the fact that, always keep in mind if after an incident, if you are involved in one, to be able to get checked up physically. That also gives you time to kind of get ahold of all—for you guys, you had the legal procedures already in place, but that also gives you some time, number one, to get yourself checked out and make sure to check your heart rate, EKG, everything that's going on. And then at that, it also gives you an opportunity to make those calls to counsel and especially to your family, let them know, like you said, Scott, let them know right off the bat, you know, that you're fine. So, that's a really key point. So, let's do this. What are some of the pearls of wisdom or nuggets of information that you would want to give the audience, you know, from that whole physical, psychological, legal, social, and organizational survival when you start to deal with an incident like this? What are some things that you want to tell people that they should do initially?

Scott A.: I would say, just always be prepared. Always have your equipment somewhere where you can get to it. Have it clean, you know, well-organized, ready to go. Be ready with the mindset, you know, that this—it could happen now, it could happen at any time, so you're not as surprised if it does happen, you know, and always, you know, always make sure you maintain that will to win that situation. Far too

often, you know, you see officers that seem to kind of give up once things aren't going well in a situation.

Floyd W.: Right.

Scott A.: You know, just fight through it, get through it.

Floyd W.: Right. What about you, George?

George M.: One thing I would say is, you know, the capacity in my magazine—I only had eight rounds. And, you know, when you're off duty, you think eight rounds is enough, but sometimes eight's not enough. I'm not saying to go, you know, arm yourself for bear before you leave the house, but I did go up in rounds on my next off duty purchase. And, you know, just making sure that you have the right equipment, you know how to use it. And if you are involved in one of these situations, whether you're on duty or off duty, you're going to go through some, through some experiences, the legal system and everything. Be patient. Lean on your support system. And don't be afraid to communicate with somebody you trust. Don't be afraid to reach out for help, because those were things that definitely helped me out afterwards. You know, getting awards is nice, but it's not always easy to accept them when you're in a situation like this. So, my thing is get off the X, be prepared, be a good witness. Don't get involved if you don't have to but help out in any way you can. Don't insert your family into situations they don't belong in. And make sure that you're communicating with whoever you're at, because when you're off duty, you don't have that radio. You don't have that ID. There's a lot of missing pieces. So, there's a lot to think about there.

Floyd W.: Right. What about also your fitness? You know, for folks that are listening, their fitness, getting that sleep, getting to sleep cycles, right, and having that good diet. What about that, Scott?

Scott A.: Oh, definitely very important. I mean, we talked about some of the changes that will happen. You know, some of the, you know, like, the tunnel vision and that kind of stuff, all of that. All of that is a function of how well, fit you are, at some point, you know, you start getting your, your blood pressure starts going up. Your heart rate starts going

up. If that's artificially elevated because you're not in such good shape, you're going to have a harder time to control that. So, definitely all that stuff. And then making sure you get enough sleep so that you can think clearly—it's all very important.

Floyd W.: And what about being prepared for a social media onslaught and the media and in guarding your personal identifiable information? What about that, George?

George M.: Please avoid social media after an incident. Don't watch the news. Don't read the comments. There are keyboard cowards out there, and all they want to do is destroy you and your family. I know, I read Scott's story and how brutal the media was on him. You know, it's—please do yourself a favor, one, understand this. Anything that's in a newspaper today will be lining Polly's bird cage tomorrow. Don't worry about it. Do not give them the headspace by reading those comments and never, never respond to them because that is opening the floodgates. That's—I would just leave that in a dot point right there.

Floyd W.: Right, and Scott, what about home security in today's current environment, and varying your routes, which we should be doing anyway, to your residence? What have you done, you know, to plus that up a little bit?

Scott A.: We have—I put the motion lights on the outside, put the camera. Like you said, complacency and routine are the two things that get us in a lot of trouble. So, I try to be more aware of what's going on. You know, I will notice some of those changes around the neighborhood and around the house and stuff. And I do take that different route home now, you know. I don't always take the same route home. I have more of a luxury now that I live further away from the station than I did before, but, you know, definitely big things to keep in mind.

Floyd W.: Gotcha. Gotcha. So, right now, let's go ahead and field a couple of questions. Do you guys have anything else that you want throw in there real quickly, anything you might have forgotten that you wanted to speak to?

Scott A.: I agree with George. After one of these incidents, you know, people want to reach out and talk to you, want to help you and stuff. If they're offering help, and it's good to help, take it. Don't be afraid to talk to people. It's okay to ask for help, you know, to get through this. There are a lot of people out there that have been through things that are willing to talk to you and let you know that you're okay, that things are, you know—that what you're going through is normal.

Floyd W.: Got you. So, I've got a question here. There's someone from Colorado. They said their legislator took away their qualified immunity last year. Did either of you get sued by the suspect, and did your agency cover you from a liability standpoint?

George M.: Alright. So, yeah, that's a good question. And obviously, the terms in the states vary. In Maryland, we had something—well, it's probably, hopefully nationwide, but the Law Enforcement Officers' Bill of Rights. I always counted on that to back me up while I was on duty in jurisdiction. I had no idea that that does not exist in DC and it's soon not to exist in other parts of the country. I was fortunate to not personally be sued. I mean, I was also fortunate that my entire incident was captured on camera, and it was as clear as day, including previous victims prior to me getting assaulted. So, once again, I did not get sued, but my union was ready to back me up. We had legal defense on retainer always, and my agency was there to support me, but it was a little outside the process because it wasn't our agency handling the situation.

Floyd W.: Right. And I've got another question from Katie Waddy, from, looks like from Buffalo—looks like she struggles with how to prepare her kids. And it looks like they're ten and six. I think that I'm reading that right. Scott, you want to take that?

Scott A.: That can be a difficult conversation to have with them, you know, to let them know, you know, what could happen. Unfortunately, my kids learned it the hard way, witnessing all of that, but like, you know—like I was saying before, I've briefed them on how to take care of themselves. You know, that if I say, you know—if something happens, you know, where to go, how to get away, if, you know, something's going to happen, odds are, unless it's imminent happening right there,

I'm not going to get involved. I'm going to take them, and we're going to move away until it becomes that imminent, you know, it is happening now kind of thing. And then, like I said, I just tell them, you know, "I've got to go to work, you know, walk away, go somewhere else." You know, and like I said, in stores, they know to go to the register area because I know they can find an adult there. In other places, I try to find another landmark for them to go to.

Floyd W.: Yeah, and I'm seeing here, there's another thing from Catherine. She's talked to when she found the off-duty LEOs and other emergency responders are the worst callers, but just make sure that we're giving out all the information that we can possibly put out to identify ourselves. I found myself with a couple off duties, and again, you know, sometimes you act before—especially as a young officer, I kind of acted before I thought about it, because you got kind of wrapped around the axle, right? And I think it's really important that we take our time. You know, make sure that we're quick, but we don't hurry and look at what's important. Now, let me look at another one here. One gentleman says, "I know a few LEOs who arranged with their local fire department to park their take-homes at the fire department and drive their personals the rest of the way home." That could be an option for you. And we're talking about the fact that, do you vary your routes? Are your vehicles in front of your residence that identify you? And I know we had take-home cars, and I had been followed home before, and I ended up having to hide my vehicle. But, you know, by that time they already know, you know, where you are, right?

Floyd W.: Right. Do you guys have take-homes? What's the deal with you?

Scott A.: I do. I have an unmarked take-home now. At the time this happened, I had a really good take-home, it was an unmarked little Ford Escape—little small one. It didn't look anything like a police car, but this guy, even though he moved in since I'd given up my marked car, he still somehow knew. Because before, right before this happened, he would kind of drive by, blow his horn, and keep driving, but not look at me. And I always thought, you know, he's just, I mean, I didn't think anything more than that until all of this went down. So, somehow, you know—they'll know, they can pick it up. The neighbors talk and all of

that. So, don't rely on the fact that your marked car is not out there and think that they can't find you.

Floyd W.: Right.

George M.: I had a buddy park his state trooper car in front of my house once overnight, and everybody then thought I was a state trooper. I'm not.

Floyd W.: And obviously, you're not, but you know what guys? I'm going to wrap up, but I really want to make sure that, you know, the audience gets the takeaway today. That, first of all, we're cautioning you in taking any kind of action off duty. That, that's the most important thing to be that good witness—unless somebody's safety is at stake, like the incidents that you've heard today. And again, I encourage you to make sure that you look at those other products. Don't put yourself in a situation where you're in an officer-created jeopardy conundrum and do reality-based training, both with off-duty and responding officers. Remember, you don't have to wait for your agency to start doing survival training in these areas. Because again, it's been almost like a taboo thing that we don't really train, you know, with off-duty kind of scenarios because we try to dissuade involvement. But the fact is, these things, you know—when you're out in the field, you know, these events pick you. You don't get a chance to pick them.

So, Sergeant Angulo, Officer Mussini have shared a lot of information with you, and I hope you put it to work like immediately. I hope you go ahead and start to work on your thought process. If you listen to George, a lot of things he said that he did before he left his house—so, that's the kind of thing we want you to train your brain to do that and change some of your behaviors. And I thank you both tremendously for spending time to educate others across the country as you have been doing through your contributions to respond to unforeseen incidents off duty of which you can—you never know that you're going to be involved in. And I bet if I spoke to any of you, you would never believe that was going to happen. And I hope it doesn't happen to you. But remember, hope is not a strategy, training is.

Scott A.: That's correct.

Floyd W.: Now, next month's THRIVE webcast will be on the topic of casualty care. Watch your email for additional information. I encourage you to reach out to us. If you have any additional questions, just reach out to us through the website www.valorforblue.org for more information on this topic and other officer safety wellness products that we have. That being said, I want to thank you all for joining us and the VALOR crew for this very important and necessary conversation. And if you would, can you please give us a thumbs up and subscribe to the VALOR YouTube channel? We'd appreciate that. And until later, stay safe, stay healthy, and stay well. See you soon.