

## #74 (GRANT EDWARDS)

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### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Reducing Crime features conversations with influential thinkers in the police service, and leading crime and policing researchers.

When Grant Edwards retired as a commander from the Australian Federal Police, he'd amassed a wealth of experiences as well as enough post-traumatic stress that he nearly took his own life. We talk about his career, his experiences, and what policing can do to help officers better manage their mental wellbeing.

### Jerry Ratcliffe:

Hi, I am Jerry Ratcliffe, and this is Reducing Crime. Some months ago, my work travels took me to Australia. Yeah, I know. Tough life, blah, blah, blah. Aussie professors Peter Miller and Isa Bartkowiak-Théron hosted a conference on trauma-informed policing and law enforcement on the beautiful Melbourne Riverfront. They're wonderfully hospitable, and if that's your area of interest, then I strongly recommend you check out their conference.

It also provided me with a chance to chat to Grant Edwards. Before I introduce Grant, I should discuss trigger warnings. Now, the research on trigger warnings seems increasingly clear, a 2023 Meta-analysis found that, and I quote, "At best, warnings have no effect on the comprehension of material. At worst, because trigger warnings seem to reliably increase anticipatory anxiety responses, trigger warnings have the potential to increase apprehension and anxiousness."

That being said, I'm going to tell you upfront that this episode discusses officer wellness and an explicit suicide attempt because if I don't, one or two people who don't know the research will try and score points by calling me out on it. Grant and I also discuss his experiences working in the prevention and detection of online child abuse and what he was exposed to during that period of his work life. So please bear in mind that this episode is pretty confronting and might not be for everyone. Don't listen to it when you have the kids in the car.

Should you still listen? Oh, hell yeah. Because Grant's a bit of a legend. In 2019, he retired as a commander from the AFP. That's the Australian Federal Police after 34 years' service, having worked in everything from international drug trafficking, intelligence and major organized crime to human trafficking and child exploitation. He worked on overseas deployment in Timor-Leste, or what used to be called East Timor and Afghanistan, overseeing the AFP's contribution

to rebuilding the Afghan Police. Grant also spent seven years in the U.S., culminating as the AFP's liaison officer in Washington D.C., covering law enforcement engagement across North, Central and South America.

Grant holds a master's degree in leadership, policy and governance studies from one of my old employers, Charles Sturt University, as well as being a graduate of the Australian National University and the FBI Law Enforcement Senior Executive Program.

Grant's represented Australia in athletics, bobsleigh and the Scottish Highland games, and competed in strongman events. Grant's pulled steam trains, planes, boats, trucks, all of this culminating in a Guinness world record for single-handedly pulling a-hundred-and-one-ton steam locomotive.

As you're going to hear in this episode, later in his career, he also suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD and came close to becoming another tragic statistic that plagues the law enforcement world. His personal experiences with PTSD have been featured on Australian television, and he now presents across the world on his mental health experience.

In 2019, he published his memoir, *The Strongman*, and in 2023 Grant published *Who Protects the Protectors*, where he talks about the importance of mental health management in policing. It's available on Amazon.

We started out talking by the conference's coffee station. Not a complaint on my part because Australia has fantastic coffee, but you can occasionally hear them preparing the coffee stuff at times in the background. As you join us, we're talking about ex-wives.

**Grant Edwards:**

... wrote the book, I hardly mentioned her in it, and there's a reason why. But anyway, I thought I was doing the right thing.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You would talk about everything except your ex-wife? [laughter].

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, but ironically, her new husband bought it. She was fucking livid. So...eh. That's life, isn't it?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, you've got kids together, haven't you?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I don't talk about my ex-wife too much, but she pops up on the podcast every now and again-

**Grant Edwards:**

Does she?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And then the other day she says, "Oh, I listened to the episode with Scott Payne," who... did 20 years undercover with the FBI and white supremacist organizations. And I'm thinking, "Oh, that's nice." I'm thinking, "Oh, shit she listens."

**Grant Edwards:**

She's probably got ghost people out there. "You need to listen to this one. Listen to this."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, he talks about you, no."

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, with Facebook, although I only stayed on it as a means of communication with my daughter when she was younger.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But a whole chunk of that kind of stuff, especially after you just recently divorced, it's all very tense and nobody knows else wants to do.

**Grant Edwards:**

No, that's right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And a couple of years later, nobody gives a shit one way or the other way.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. The lesson for me on that was, just how much your personal business is everyone's business in the police. I had no idea the interest that people had in my ex-marital life and any future love life. Why? Why is it important to you? But I guess it's that inquiry minus that need to know. But people seem to want to gossip about personal life probably more than any other profession that I know about, but...

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, it's interesting because you've taken this journey and you've opened up a whole area for people in policing that is not an area they normally talk about. Nobody likes to talk about mental health. Nobody likes to talk about post-traumatic stress and people just in policing, you muddle on through, you grit your teeth and you keep going for 20, 30 years and people don't want to talk about that. So there's that piece to it.

Then there's the other side that you had a serious rank as well. You came out of the... I mean, how many years did you do in the Australian Federal Police?

**Grant Edwards:**

34.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you came out as?

**Grant Edwards:**

Commander. I didn't seek promotion probably for about 14 years, because I was sort of wedded to the old school that you had to earn and you had to make sure that you'd done enough.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, I think those days are gone now.

**Grant Edwards:**

Oh, they are.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

People are getting promoted in 20 minutes.

**Grant Edwards:**

I know, I know. But I remember I got promoted to sergeant in 2002, superintendent 2004 and then commander 2006.

It happened real quick, but it was also coincided with a period of growth for the organization as well.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Do you think it was too quick?

**Grant Edwards:**

No, no, I don't.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You'd done your time on the front lines, right?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. I used to joke with people that towards the end, that the two longest periods in my career were constable and commander, and I was almost getting to the stage where if I had stayed on until I had intended to till I was 60, that would've been the longest time that I held rank, but I never sought promotion beyond that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Was policing always something on your mind?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, I was born into a policing family, if you like. My mother's brother, he was a police officer in New South Wales Police, as was my mother's brother-in-law. They were both New South Wales police.

One exited early because of mental health issues and then the other one, my mother's brother, he died of a brain aneurysm shortly after he retired, but he spent most of his career in forensics. So he would do all the forensic investigations on fatal accidents and things like that. And he definitely had PTSD. He never had it diagnosed, but he had a serious issue with alcohol.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

But he struggled. Never spoke about it. It's the elephant in the room wherever you go.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right? Isn't it? Yeah. And so you've opened up that elephant now. You just mentioned PTSD. What I thought was interesting is, that in your presentation I was watching earlier, you were talking about PTSI.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Help me understand the difference between them.

**Grant Edwards:**

PTSD goes back to the DM-V classifications of psychological disorders they call them.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So we're talking post-traumatic stress disorder.

**Grant Edwards:**

Post-traumatic stress disorder. And the term disorder has, I guess, a symbolic mean of something that is inherited that you're born with. If you've got a disorder, it's not something that you can innately occur to you an injury.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Are we born with,... We can't be born with PTSD.

**Grant Edwards:**

Some would argue those that had suffered fetal alcoholism or fetal drug potentially, yes. But that was something that didn't implicitly occur to them. We right with that?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, we're okay. We're by the coffee machine. It's fine.

**Grant Edwards:**

It's like, this is the way police do most of their business, although I'm not anymore.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right, yeah.

**Grant Edwards:**

It used to be in bars, but there's coffee shops now. Yeah. So an injury, and I know I prefer that terminology, and I think you heard in the presentation that there's some psychiatrists now that are really pushing to have that modified to injury as opposed to disorder, because disorder just embellishes the stigma.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

Whereas an injury is something as close as you can get to a seen injury. I mean, PTSD is the unseen injury, but if you break your arm, break your leg, what have you, people know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, considering that that's something that's going to affect people in policing in particular, especially anybody or in any emergency service as frontline work, that seems vastly more appropriate. PTSD.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sorry, we'll have to pause for a minute, because they're trying to build the coffee cups as loudly as possible.

**Grant Edwards:**

Well, I know they're going to have angry people coming out at afternoon tea that need their caffeine hit.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Post-traumatic... post... Bloody hell. I blame jetlag or I keep getting my 'mucking furds wuddled'.

**Grant Edwards:**

I get it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So post-traumatic stress injury. When I think of an injury, of course I left policing because I broke my femur in half ice climbing. So I think of an injury as a kind of specific incident. When you look back on your time, and I got the sense from your presentation, but correct if I'm wrong, that it really was a sort of creeping, growing thing for you.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

There's not one particular thing that springs to mind or are there key incidents that you sort of equate to a sense of injury?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, there's certainly key incidents, but at the time I didn't know because one, I was I guess illiterate on mental health. I knew as a sports person, I did a lot of work with psychologists, etc. That was purely for being in the moment or being on a sporting parlance, but what I didn't know was, the insidious nature of mental health in terms of [inaudible] up with depression, PTSD, and then PTSI. So, I flip between D and I but, and all the other related incidences of that.

But for me, I call it the cumulative effect. And I find from talking to the many people that I have in law enforcement and first responders, it's actually the cumulative event. We talk about resilience, and resilience, being able to overcome things. I would argue that no amount of resilience will get you through some of the things that you get exposed to in a police in a law enforcement career. It was never spoken about when I was in the job, not until the very last few years that I was there. So I was just assuming that you would see things, smell things, touch things, and you just got on with it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, there are certainly things that I can recall. After a while you see a couple of dead bodies that are long past their sell-by date, but it's really sort of almost like an accumulated kind of sense of an injury in a way.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. I find it is insidious. I'd liken it to something like a heart attack where you just don't have a heart attack out of the blue one day. There's a series of things that happen in your past, but there's usually some form of underlying issue there, whether it be because of your lifestyle, because of a genetic issue or because there's a malfunction or a deformity, but you don't know it until it happens.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

When I broke my leg, I know what the reason was that I left the job. But for people who've got PTSI, it's hard to predict what that thing is, because what's possibly something that's injury-relating for one person is just the other person like, "I'm fine with that." This has been a weird conference, but we had trigger warnings for absolutely everything from spiders to, and I'm about to go and talk about concrete sheep, but the piece of it is that you just don't know what it is.

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10 cops could walk into a room with a body that's been there for weeks in terrible circumstances and 9 are fine and one of them, that's the thing that keeps them awake at night.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, absolutely.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Makes it so difficult for the organization to deal with and for the individuals.

**Grant Edwards:**

It is. Just like there's no one size fits all. It doesn't exist. It's very individually based, and you're right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But if you say it can't be fixed.

**Grant Edwards:**

That's my opinion.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, that's okay, but can it be managed?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes, yes. You learn to live with it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Can you do that in healthy ways?

**Grant Edwards:**

You can. Well, I believe you can, because I have. It's not a linear process. It's up, it's down, it's forwards, it's backwards because you're dealing with the brain and the brain is a highly complex muscle, if you like.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you were one of the world's strongest men at one point. I mean, you showed us some incredible pictures and videos of you dragging trains and I mean, was that Hercules C130?

**Grant Edwards:**

I've done a Hercules C130. I've done a Globemaster C17.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And you actually shifted that thing from stationary?



**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Good grief.

**Grant Edwards:**

You just don't step up and pull something.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, all I'll be pulling is every muscle in my body.

**Grant Edwards:**

Well, that's the risk if you don't get into it. I was lucky enough to compete in probably the halcyon period of Strongman, and there was one particular guy, Magnus Ver Magnusson, four times world's strongest man. When I pulled the train, what you don't see in that video is Magnus is actually walking alongside sort of helping me.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So what's interesting about this is, being one of the world's strongest men and winning competitions and the like, that requires an awful lot of mental resilience, the training, the preparation. I mean, you were just talking about Magnus Magnusson helping you, which I'm sure is just mental resilience to do that. And yet there was a struggle to take that mental resilience from that part of your life and bring it back to policing.

**Grant Edwards:**

100%. What I know now after the copious amounts of therapy that I've gone through is, that I gravitated towards sport, because sport kept my mind off everything else. So what I ended up doing was pretty much filling my life up with what could be called distraction. So I was competing at a professional level in Strongman, I was doing my degree at university, I was working very long hours in the police. That probably didn't help my first marriage, and that happens a lot with policing. It's a recognized thing is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, we all have a starter relationship, don't we?

**Grant Edwards:**

Well, in the US it's three. Supposedly, the research shows three for every person in law enforcement, which I was astounded at. It was a distraction from me say that unbeknownst to me, the PTSD was in the background, but I didn't give it time to grow.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

To some degree, would you say that a little bit, you brought it into the job and then the job, just the circumstances of life in the job expanded it. I'm not in any way shape or form, anybody should be discussing this in any way, I should warn you, but I've got no skills in this area. So if my language is wandering in all the wrong directions, isn't it?

**Grant Edwards:**

That's perfectly fine. It's better that way. Actually, I didn't bring it into the job. I mean, I had somewhat of a traumatic childhood.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, we talked about that.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, but I honestly don't think that I had any baggage. Having said that, for the better part of a decade and a half, I didn't know that I had a PTSD, that I had an injury.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So when did it dawn on you? When did you learn that you actually had a PTSD?

**Grant Edwards:**

Well, my GP was the first one to suggest it. I think it was late 2013 when I'd got back from Afghanistan and I resisted it. I didn't want to accept it. I thought he was wrong. I mean, he was me questioning a medical practitioner, but I thought he was wrong. I said, "I don't have PTSD."

But the reason I did that is because I went into survival mode. I thought of all the issues surrounding stigma about what it would be like not only as a police officer but as a senior police officer, but also in all the other things that I did in my life. And it probably sent me on a downward spiral when he mentioned that, because I'd not ever thought of it. It didn't even enter my mind. I just thought, "This thing's happened. Yeah, sure. It's the impact of the job, but it's age-related, it's..." "

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Was part of it you thinking about how people in the job feel about mental health?

**Grant Edwards:**

There's a great awareness now of mental health.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, but back then.

**Grant Edwards:**

Back then, not much at all. And I'm only saying 10 years ago. I mean, the last 10 years has been leaps forward, but we're still nowhere near where we need to be.

But back then, if you declared a mental health injury, mostly you get your accoutrements taken away. You're basically non-operational.

Now, technically that rank, I wasn't operational, but I was looking after some serious work and I never once thought... I'd seen people that had had mental health injuries that were very quickly frog-marched out of the organization.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's truth.

**Grant Edwards:**

Without help. And I didn't want to be one of those.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

And there's no way in this world that I was ever going to declare it to my organization, let alone declare it to myself. I wouldn't accept it. I forced my doctor to redact the information on his computer so there was no record of it, of him suggesting that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Why do you think you weren't open to it? You've been to Afghanistan, and I think people aren't aware that Australian police, especially Australian Federal Police, end up with a lot of overseas secondments to UN and to other missions. You've had a chance to travel the world with the Australian Federal Police. You've spent time with people overseas in combat zones and with the military, and you've been around Southeast Asia, other places where it's often a mixed military and police deployment. So you were aware of PTSD in military circumstances. So why did it take you by surprise when you got this diagnosis?

**Grant Edwards:**

Because I didn't think that I'd done the work that would provide the platform for me to do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you hadn't been in major firefights left, right, and center?

**Grant Edwards:**

No, I hadn't. And I always was under the impression that PTSD was mostly a military-type injury that you occurred. There was very little spoken about it in police. I mean, some in the military will say that it's still not too different there,

but we now know the level of mental health problems in the military, and that's across the world, but certainly not in the police.

Again, from police in perspective, your exposure to mental health is usually the worst. You don't go to see someone that's got depression. You go to someone that's acting out that has got behavioral problems, that is suicidal, that is whatever.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

We never see people at their best.

**Grant Edwards:**

No, and that becomes your prism. That's the view that you see things through. And I saw mental health only or mental injury through that very, very pointy end of the pyramid and I didn't want to be one of those statistics.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you got this initial diagnosis, you pushed back against it. What brought you round to a realization or at least being more open to the possibility that you'd had this collection of injuries?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, I knew things were bad in 2014 when I got to the point where I'd had many suicidal ideations, but just because you have ideations I now know, doesn't mean that you necessarily go through with it, but you think about it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it's scary?

**Grant Edwards:**

It is scary, yeah, because when you start thinking about ending your life, it's a reminder of mortality and it's even a subconscious reminder to you that we all have a limited time on earth and eventually, we all meet our maker, so to speak. But when you start talking about suicide and especially the ideations and the methodologies, that's one step closer to acting out.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I mean, I don't know, but I suppose the difference is that at some point this life will end, but I don't know what it is. So it's some abstract point in the future, whereas when you're actually thinking about ending your life, "It'll be tomorrow evening," you can put a finite timeframe on it.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. And you can rationalize it away. That's probably the scariest part because for me, I'd gotten to the stage where after the doctor, my GP had mentioned that to me, it was probably six or seven months later, and I just kept going further and further and further downhill.

I'm a fix-it kind of guy. A lot of police are, they want to get in to fix things and as a police officer, there's nothing worse than asking someone else to fix you because you're so used to fixing all the other problems in the world when it comes to law and order and things like that. And I couldn't fix myself.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So these thoughts kept coming back more often?

**Grant Edwards:**

They kept coming back, coming... I mean, I had disturbed sleep. I was having nightmares, and I couldn't understand. The nightmares didn't equate to what it was that I eventually found out I was having nightmares about because I didn't have flashbacks. There wasn't an incident. I wasn't hit. Wasn't hit by an IED. I wasn't in a gunfight, wasn't in a-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It comes back to what I was saying earlier. There's no one thing to tie this to.

**Grant Edwards:**

No. But for me, it all started about the exploitation of women and children in particular, the work that I did around sexual assault and the developing online, remember this was back in the early 2000s. It was still relatively in its infancy where you're exposed day in day out to watching children being abused horribly, not because you want to, but because you have to. And then often replaying tapes looking for indicators because you were-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Trying to figure out where they are.

**Grant Edwards:**

Where they are, what jurisdiction they're in.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've spoken to people who've done this work before and I said to them, "The images must be awful," and they kind of said, "You kind of get used to the images. It's the audio."

**Grant Edwards:**

That's the thing. I never had a problem with dead bodies. I mean, as much as it's bad when they're dead, they're dead.

But when you hearing people in pain or you're watching someone die, which I thankfully haven't, and I've spoken to people that have, that's the real traumatic part that transpires from a PTSD into a moral injury, because you are not able to save the person.

Now, I know that I suffered the whole idea with moral injury, because most of the matters that I looked at, I never had closure. Some we did, you'd pass them on and you'd hear they've arrested somebody, but there were thousands that we were never able to identify these poor... And I'm talking kids as young as six months old being horrendously abused.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You just mentioning that about seeing lots and lots of dead bodies, I mean, it immediately jumped into my mind and I, like you, get called to a lot of sudden deaths. You go and [inaudible] a lot of bodies. And I think I've been to the third one in a week and I kicked the door in to this old guy's apartment and he's lying in the bathroom and cold and he's got no pulse. And I'm just about to go through the usual motions and he blinked at me. And it was like, "Holy shit, we need an ambulance for this guy. Right now. Like yesterday." And it's funny that that's the one I have vastly more vivid details and recollections of than the dozens I've been dealing with, the multiples per week the way through that winter and previous winters. That's the one that stands out in my mind.

**Grant Edwards:**

And sometimes it's the tiniest thing that tips you over the edge. I had this analogy and I used it, I didn't use it today, but I use it, about carrying a backpack. So I say, the day you join the job, you're given a backpack. Three-year-old can wear a backpack if it's light. But every day you go to work, you put a pebble in that backpack, it gets a bit heavier in the first few years, but you're still young.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sure.

**Grant Edwards:**

You can manage it. You've got resilience. By the time you've been in 10 years, it's starting to get a little bit awkward. By about 15, 20 years, you're like, "I can't wear it anymore, but I can lift it." By the time you get to 30 and above, it's full. There's no more space left." And that's where you get that accumulation where you get to a point where you're saturated.

That's pretty much what happened to me. That's what led to me to have that epiphany, because I'd been told that I had PTSD, I wouldn't recognize it. I wasn't getting better. I'd made the attempt on my life and I thought it was cathartic, because I had been given the position of the Commander in Americas, which for me would be the highlight of my career.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And this was?

**Grant Edwards:**

2015.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Where were you?

**Grant Edwards:**

I was actually in Washington D.C. My colleague that was there in Washington, I'd emailed him a year earlier saying, "Hey, I'm going to put in for these. I'll come over." He goes, "Come and stay with me. It's great. We'll do all that stuff."

Again, that was part of that, filling my life with things that would stop me from having thoughts and getting involved. I was pretty proficient at it towards the end.

I got to Washington. I'd been extremely busy the week before. I was really quite tired and fatigued when I got there. And then he said, "Come on, let's go out. I'll take you through and around." And I thought, "I can't do this." I thought, "I cannot do this."

And I became conflicted because I had my wife back home arranging schools and getting rid of our house and our car and all that and then I had the AFP setting me up to come over. And I remember laying in the bedroom at the house one day going, "I've got a whole lot of things going on here and I don't know if I can do this job."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You said that you tried to take your life?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Was that before or after this?

**Grant Edwards:**

Before.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Before this?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. This would've been mid to late 2015. I was due to start in Washington. I think I started in August. I was only a few months away. I remember thinking to myself, "I don't want to be one of those people that goes over, spend six months here then they've got to bring me back and I've completely destroyed my family's career and life and things. I've let the organization down. I've let Australia down, I've let myself down."

So it was him that I told, and I told him, because we had a long friendship and I trusted him. We're sitting under one of the bridges in Washington, D.C. at a coffee shop. And just out of the blue, I just said him, "They've told me I've got PTSD." And his reaction was like a lot of reactions I got after that. He goes, "Are you kidding me?" I went, "No." He goes, "I would never have picked it." He said, "You of all people?"

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Camouflage mechanisms have been perfected by them.

**Grant Edwards:**

Absolutely. And we talked about in policing, you almost have two personas. We used to joke, you strap on your police persona when you go to work. If you're in uniform, you kit up and everything. If you're plain clothes, you put your weapon on, then you become Mr. Policeman and you try and undo that to go home. But it doesn't work that way, unfortunately. You bring things home with you.

So I told him, and he was brilliant. He's very supportive. He said, "Look, let's not make any decisions." He said, "Let's just work this through. Sorry." He wanted to know the background of it and what I'd known. And he said, "Let's ring the boss."

So I was lucky, the commissioner, who you saw in the film clip, I'd known him for a long, long time. And I basically needed to let him know because if he didn't have confidence in me, I wasn't going to go to Washington.

I'd reconciled in my mind that my career was over because I'm going to tell the commissioner of the AFP that I've got a PTSI. And I made a whole lot of assumptions that weren't necessarily correct at the time.

There were three things he asked me-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Who was the commissioner by the way? Was that-

**Grant Edwards:**

Andrew Colvin. He said, "Are you going to seek treatment?" And I said, "Well, yes." And he said, "If you're given medication, will you take medication?" And I said, "Yes."

And he said, "If I would send you to Washington, would you still do both of those?" And I said, "Yeah." I was kind of perplexed. I said, "Yes."

And he said, "Well, what have I got to worry about?"

I went, "Oh."

He said, "I'd much rather be in a position where I know that somebody has an injury like this and we can wrap a support mechanism around you. What would concern me more is that you didn't disclose it to me and I don't know, and then I start hearing things, what going on?"

I thought that was a really measured response, and it wasn't something that he'd thought about. It just come straight out. And to me, those questions were exactly what leaders ought to be doing, asking questions if someone comes forward. Because it completely diffused my mind in terms of what I thought was about to happen to me.



And I did that. I remember going home that night sending my wife the longest email, because I thought she didn't know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Sure. Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

Her response was, "I've known for a while. That's why I got the doctor to ask you that." And that's why I talk about families being the canary in the coal mine, that they are the people that see the changes-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

See it first. Yeah.

**Grant Edwards:**

... first. But law enforcement historically haven't supported families. And even when you are the one that has the injury, they get left behind. They're the ones cleaning up the mess if you like, that you leave, because you are in complete survival mode. You're not thriving. You're just trying to survive.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So when you tried to take your life after this, was that the lowest point? Was that like a switch being thrown?

**Grant Edwards:**

It happened real quickly. So I'd ideated.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Tell me what you mean by that.

**Grant Edwards:**

The thought processes. So it's about thinking about suicide. It's not about acting it out, it's thinking about it. Most people don't get through with it, but some do. Because if you're going to take your own life, you've got to think of a way to do it. It just doesn't happen.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it's so easy for police officers because they so often have access to firearms.

**Grant Edwards:**

Well, exactly. And that's what prompted, that got me into this position where I'm talking about it openly now, when the AFP had a series of suicides by firearms. Even at my worst, I guess I was still thinking about others, I was worried about, "How could I do this in the least messy way?" I didn't want to take tablets. And then my family come home and find me. The firearm wasn't an option because my thoughts were, "Well, there you go. I'm going to basically traumatism half a dozen people if I do that". So I was trying to think of ways, something that was, in my mind, it was an everyday

occurrence. It's not because a single vehicle accident is not necessarily an everyday occurrence. But I guess if you're going to look on a trauma scale, perhaps it's the least of many of the traumas. And that's what I planned to do.

But also because of insurance purposes. And it would never be attributed to a mental health condition. It'd be a single vehicle accident. I fell asleep, dodged something. And what we do know now in suicides, especially in policing, I wasn't aware of this at the time, that there's been a lot of suicides over the years that have been single-vehicle accidents.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

How did that turn things around for you?

**Grant Edwards:**

It didn't initially. I was in the throes of it, and then I stopped. What happened immediately after that is, I went into the shame period, because I was conflicted. I'm like, "You weak prick. You didn't even have the balls to do this."

But then the other half of me goes, "No, you did the right thing. You're not going to put your family through..." And I took myself off the road and I didn't actually go to work that day, I just went rang in sick. I sat in a coffee shop, I went through all the emotions. I cried, I was distraught-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

So you'd reached the stage that you were in the car, you were driving down the road, you had a location, you had the plan?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, and I'd actually taken my seatbelt off and got to maximum speed. I knew exactly where I was going to go. I had it pinned down and I knew which part I need to hit for maximum effect. And by not having a seatbelt on, you get maximum impact.

Initially, I would have feelings like it wasn't meant to happen, but then I would've other feelings like, "Man, it's the simplest thing in life and you couldn't do it." So you spend more time on the negative than you did on the positives. And they just led to me drinking more, taking more over-the-counter medications and stumbling through life where I thought, I think I had most people fooled, except my family. Most of my colleagues didn't know that I'd been going through this torture for quite a few years now. And having said that, though, I was one of those that didn't know either.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You've obviously come out of it in a much better place?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Now looking back, what are the lessons? I mean, you're not going to be the only person in policing.

**Grant Edwards:**

No. Far from it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's going to be incredibly common.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, and it still is, and it's still under-reported, and there are still so many police and first responders that will not come forward.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What can organizations do to create that place that people can come forward? People have got to get this out of their system. It's got to come out, right?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. That's a really good question. I mean, we talk about a mentally safe workplace. There's a few around that I have seen, but in law enforcement, I've not seen one where I could comfortably say it is a permanent, mentally safe place to come and come and be.

Part of that is the police culture. Part of it is the type of people that are attracted to policing and not having the processes in place or having the processes in place, but the culture always overrides it. Seeing commissioners and chief constables had the best of intentions, and they want to change this, but the rank and file still see it as it's just an ass-covering exercise. It's an exercise of protecting the organization, protecting the bosses so that when something happens, they can say, "Yeah, we've done this, we did this, we did this, we did this."

It really doesn't matter how much you do in terms of making resources available, it's more about changing the internal workplace. What I mean by that is, I find I see the most effect when people show their vulnerability where it's okay to be vulnerable. We've got to stop this notion in society that these people like police and fire, that they're invincible, because they're not.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right. So almost you have to trust the management before you can trust the program they put in place?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah,

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Almost building trust before you even bring the program in is hugely important, because if you can't see that there's a level of trust, you are not going to open up to the organization?

**Grant Edwards:**

And that's one of the principles of the culture is, a distrusting. From day one-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, yeah.

**Grant Edwards:**

From day one-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Once you become a management cop, you don't know shit; I'm on the front line.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, exactly. But you are taught that. We're all taught that. When you come through the police, well, I certainly was, trust nobody, because you're going to see someone straight-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You're going to get jammed up?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. They're going to lie to you straight up, so be skeptical, question them. Just don't believe what they've got to say. And that just becomes who you are. You can't disassociate from that.

I feel some people tell me they can. I'd like to know what they're taking to do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah, I know, right?

**Grant Edwards:**

But I can never do that.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, you only ever see people who are stressed, that are either the victims of crime or they're the suspects in crime and nobody's coming up to the cops, people who are just responding to police coming into their lives in a natural and normal way. It's just not how it works.

**Grant Edwards:**

I mean, there was a saying that I learned was, half of society hate you for what you do and the other half hate you for what you don't do.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

It's kind of well... I thought, "Well, actually, that's actually not too unreal."

But it's been a struggle because there is no leadership. You go through in the ranks and you go up the management and you get pounded with leadership styles, but never once have I ever had anyone come, or seen anything where they do programs specifically on how do you lead in law enforcement?

And when I talk about lead, I actually talk about, it starts with yourself. So if you can't look after yourself, how are you expected to look after other people?

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

And I talk about the importance to look after your own mental health, to do some form of movement. I don't say exercise because exercise, you get majority of people roll their eyes and go, you know, and they think of running a marathon or going to a gym, but it's about movement. Humans are made to move.

For an organization, you're not just adding a compulsory training component or you're not providing some external factor, you're actually living it, because you are changing your policies, your procedures, your strategic intent. That's all the stuff that means a lot to people, because that actually talks about embedding and changing the DNA of an organization.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Because some of the research on critical incident stress debriefing is not that good. There's some questions about whether it's really effective, but that's not really what you're talking about.

**Grant Edwards:**

No.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You're talking about that broader culture of not the specific incident, but let's just talk about the cumulative impact of just a career.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes. But also understanding that we talk about the pointy end, the post-traumatic stress, the suiciding. Honestly, in my opinion, what I see, most of the mental health issues in policing are in relation to organizational injustices, what occurs within the department, within the organization.

And that's where people that have been managing their PTSD, they're the things that push them over. I can't begin to tell you how many people, they've said, "You know what? I learned to acknowledge about the dead bodies. I learned to know about the rapes. That's part of what I do, ut what I couldn't handle was when I'm not supported, when I'm bullied, when I'm the sexual misconduct and all." They're the things that you don't ever think of when you join police.

And I'm not naive enough to say that that doesn't exist. We all know that exists, but that workplace culture, when it's toxic like that, there's a lot of times bosses don't see it, because it's the iceberg of ignorance, where you only see what's above the water. It's like, "Mr. Grace, you being served." They rolling him out. "Oh, you're doing a great job. You're all well-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's a reference that only people are about 70 years old are going to get, but I know what you mean.

**Grant Edwards:**

Isn't that your clientele? [laughter].

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Oh, [laughter].

**Grant Edwards:**

No. Oh, no, no. You'll cut that out. I know.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No, you're bugger. I'm leaving it in now.

**Grant Edwards:**

But it's true. There's too many people as they move up the ranks that are pleasers. They want to please the boss and the bosses can't see through that, because they just don't have the day-to-day access. Where the real need is, is right at that pivotal first line leadership. Like in Australia, it's the senior constable level. I'm not sure what it is, if you have that kind of rank in the UK, the sergeant level, because they're the ones that have the most access.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

I've always thought the sergeants are a hugely important role in policing that we don't give enough attention to.

**Grant Edwards:**

And we don't value it.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

No.

**Grant Edwards:**

We make an assumption that people join the police that they want to become commissioner. No. Some of the best police I've seen have never ever been promoted beyond sergeant because they just love what they're doing and that's great. But we look at that often through a skewed view of, "Well, they don't have to get up and go. They're not interested."

They're the people you need to value more because they're the ones that get the work done. And let's face it, if you're a boss, they're the ones that make you look good or can make you look bad.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

What did policing do that helped you on your recovery? Or what could they have done?

**Grant Edwards:**

Well back then, just the literacy. We never talked about general health. We talked about physical health. I was okay with that. I knew that stuff, but I didn't know anything about mental health. I didn't know about the red flags and the indicators, because I presented with all of them.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You're like a case study in every marker?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. Well, I'm actually the worst example or the best example of today where you just battle alone in silence. It's easier to do that and that's a control mechanism. That's that whole idea of control that we tend to be brought up with. It's like when you get told you got to go and do traffic on that corner. Well, you are in control completely. So many police get involved in things in their spare time because they're in control and they can do things.

If I'd had the chart which goes from good to extreme, you just need to look at the chart and give a color, because within that chart, it tells you some of the symptoms that you're feeling. And that's a wonderful tool because like I said, I couldn't articulate what I had, but when I looked at that chart afterwards, I could see that progression through those colors.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Right.

**Grant Edwards:**

Even the black humor. Police have thrived on black humor. And I try and introduce a little black humor based on myself.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

It's also a coping mechanism.

**Grant Edwards:**

It is.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You talked earlier about compassion fatigue, and I think people misinterpret the humor that I've always loved and appreciated in policing as being callous and it's not. It's a mechanism for dealing with extreme compassion fatigue.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. And we heard in one of the presentations where many of the organizations wiped all that out.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

You could be complained about if you crack some jokes.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah, yeah.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But what you end up doing is take away some people's coping mechanisms.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes. Yeah, that's right.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And sense of collegiality?

**Grant Edwards:**

Yes.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That's also a coping mechanism.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. Because let's face it, when you're in police, you're pretty much in two separate families. You have your police family, and you have your real family. If you have those coping mechanisms taken away from you, and look, we still see it on television all the time where you have a shootout, and then everyone goes and has a drink afterwards. Not the best way to do it-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

But it's a way.



**Grant Edwards:**

... but it's a way to start. And that's where if you've got people that are sensitive to it, well, why not have them there? Insert them and say, "Hey, let's have a drink, but let's have a talk about the real problem."

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That canteen culture or that drinking culture has gone away.

**Grant Edwards:**

It has.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

And with it went some negative things, and it was right not to miss them, but I agree with you. I think there were some positive components, especially for younger officers learning about the job, learning about different aspects of the job, but also having a mechanism to share things that they were struggling with.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. Because if you've got a sergeant who's just one of those angry people who's counting down his days to retirement and all that, you're not going to engage. You're not going to waste time with him. You're just going to get through and hopefully your next sergeant's a little bit better. But if you've got a sergeant who's invested in you and-

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Just cares about the team- ... They don't even have to be that good at their job. If they care about the team, that's half the battle.

**Grant Edwards:**

Yeah. And that's a whole other story about promoting on the boys network, or not promoting purely on the skills of the job merit, but not on those softer skills. We talk about softer skills, people just turn off.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Well, of course the downside is we call them soft skills, but they're hugely important.

**Grant Edwards:**

They are. And that's where the negativity comes into it. But it's something that can't be changed overnight. It's almost a generational shift.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

If you had to pick one thing that you would like to see change moving forward in policing, what would it be?

**Grant Edwards:**

Pre-recruit. When somebody is about to join the organization, yes, it's about them, but it's about their family and loved ones. And I think they need to have an honest conversation about what they're getting into. There's a mantra in police where you join to change the world and you leave being changed by the world.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

Yeah. Well, I like that about your notion on the recruitment side, because I think if recruits come in with more awareness that they are taking a job that has all these stresses and pressures, that might increase pressure for better handling of stresses and pressures and the potential for PTSD and PTSI in the job, that might start a change. And you are certainly part of that change.

So Grant, thanks very much for spending some time with me. I really appreciate it.

**Grant Edwards:**

No, been my pleasure.

**Jerry Ratcliffe:**

That was episode 74 of Reducing Crime Recorded in Melbourne, Australia in February 2024. If you or someone you know needs support, go to [reducingcrime.com/podcast/support](https://reducingcrime.com/podcast/support). You are not alone.

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