



THE REVIEW

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**"Life is not fair, it never was, it is now and it won't ever be. Do not fall into the trap. The entitlement trap, of feeling like you're a victim. You are not."
-Matthew McConaughey**

The Assistant Chief's Desk

By: Dave Tharp

Chief Freitag is recovering well from his back surgery with assistance from his dedicated and saintly wife, Jenni, and some pain medications. I volunteered to provide this week's edition of the Review in an effort to manage some risks - because an opportunity to express yourself in an open forum, with the assistance of mental altering substances, may lead to interesting outcomes – so I have been told (or witnessed at a karaoke bar...but that is another story). In keeping with the injury and recovery theme, I am going to discuss my recent Achilles surgery.

Over 9 years ago, I was climbing up and down a ladder to clean my gutters of pine needles. It was a fairly benign activity, since I was physically active, worked out regularly and considered myself easily physically capable to complete this project. However, early the next morning, I got up from bed and immediately dropped to my knees from the extreme pain I felt in my right heel. It was bad enough to warrant a visit to an orthopedic doctor and resulted in me being in a boot and on crutches for a few months while my Achilles healed. The micro tearing that was occurring in that tendon was not bad enough for surgery but was sure painful and annoying. Though I allowed for the time for healing, I did not focus on the stretching and preventative measures to assure the tearing didn't happen again. And as you can guess, it took about three years, but history repeated itself. I was doing some light workout that resulted in another issue with tearing and in a boot with crutches for months. Subsequently, after I healed up, again, years later I had decreased my physical activity as a result of my promotion to Assistant Chief, my flexibility training and workouts also suffered. This last event was my fault. After a year of laziness, I decided to recommit to workouts and training. It started out slowly, but within a short time, my confidence increased, and I began with a more intense program. Part of the new program was box jumps – jumping on to a platform 18 to 24 inches off the ground. Though I completed the program, later that night, the Achilles pain was back and this time it resulted in surgery to repair the damages.

After the surgery, it was difficult to walk again, there were hours and hours of rehabilitation visits, stretching exercises and light impact workouts. My greatest challenge was changing my behavior towards physical activity and workouts. Though I didn't have any more resting pain, I definitely felt pain when I twisted my foot, placed heavy impact on my heel or did a quick reaction movement with that foot. Today, my day starts with stretching and flexibility exercises for my ankles. My workouts start and end with long warm up and cool down stretching periods. And even my workouts and physical activity are shadowed with more deliberate movement to minimize the possibility of reinjuring my Achilles. I have a different perspective on what I must do to be healthy, physically strong and have the mobility to live life. According to my orthopedic doctor, I am at 60% and it will take another year of diligent effort to achieve 100%.

Now, to the lesson for today. I have a confession to make. I noticed that two of the past three years, I was becoming mentally lazy. The results that I noticed (and others) were a poor work product, lack of ambition, little to no motivation, apathetic attitude which all led to a poor outlook on life. When you think of mental laziness, what does that mean to you? What effects could that have on your attitude, your work, your relationships, and ultimately – your life? Do we exercise our mental capacity as much as our physical capacity to meet the challenges of our profession and our lives? Just as you think a person can become physically lazy with the subsequent consequences, you can become mentally lazy as well.

Just like with my Achilles, my mental laziness came about by seemingly benign activities that I felt I was mentally tough enough to handle – feeling life was a little too hard on me, envying others for their lives (or what they just posted on social media), continuing education or furthering education was too much time and effort, and life was too stressful – so zoning out was the best.

TED Talks – TEDx Ocala – The Secret to Becoming Mentally Strong

By: Amy Morin

<https://youtu.be/TFbv757kup4>

Everyone has the ability to build mental strength, but most people don't know how. We spend a lot of time talking about physical strength and physical health, but much less time on mental strength and mental health.

Assistant Chief's Desk Continued

In all honesty, revealing this is humbling, but there were “Achilles injury” moments in my journey of mental laziness as well. The first was right after my divorce – it was easier to dwell on the negative than the positive. I found myself becoming bitter, angry and frustrated and led to more outward blaming than introspective reflection. This happened over a couple of years, and I am sad to say, it took a lot of my mental energy to do anything other than focusing on the negative. Sure, I was plugging along and managing life, but was noticing more bad than good in my world. The second “Achilles injury” moment was when we were doing communications training and it came out that I am perceived as being unapproachable, frustrating and have a mean resting facial expression (you all know

the term). I was encouraged by my boss to work on this “or it will become a detriment to your leadership and career at CAFMA”. I knew I had some things to work on but figured that my “work attitude” was just who I was... there was no need for real improvement. An my final “Achilles” moment was really painful. I had one of my kids remind me that people are always watching and if we want them to follow in our footsteps, we better be leading by example and showing them the path. What kind of path or example was I providing? Though these “Achilles” moments did not result in a mental surgery to repair the damage, it did provide a very clear picture of how I became mentally lazy and offered an opportunity to change.

Overcoming “ourselves” is not an easy process. It takes time and a lot of effort with a laser focus on self-improvement. And humility... a lot of humility to be truthful towards what really needs to be done. For me, it began with mentally working out every day by taking little steps towards being grateful for what you have – not envying what you don’t, seeing things positively versus negatively, looking for opportunities and challenges versus throwing up roadblocks and excuses, holding yourself accountable instead of blaming others, and looking to improve yourself daily (physically and mentally) instead of just coasting on the status quo. I still have *so much* to work on, but just as I am working daily to improve my physical Achilles – I am also focusing on my mental workouts as well.

Mental health has been a point of focus for public safety and CAFMA. We are providing more support, programs and opportunities than ever before. As an agency, we are looking to improve and support our personnel with even more programs and resources with the emphasis being providing preventative help, not just treatment after the injury. As individuals, are we helping ourselves by mentally working out? Are we improving our mental fitness by focusing on appreciation, accountability, additional education and personal goals – or are we just relying on someone else to tell us what to do or satisfied with the “status quo”? Though life is not fair, not easy, and is unrelenting in its pursuit to be a challenge, we can make daily choices to not be mentally lazy. At CAFMA, we provide fitness equipment, live situation training, time to exercise, physicals, testing benchmarks, and personal trainers to prepare to meet the physical rigors and situations of emergency incidents. Despite all these resources, it still takes an *individual’s* effort to commit to working out, exercising correctly, exercising long enough, and occasionally reaching out for help to achieve a higher fitness level than sitting in a chair, eating an entire package of Oreos while watching another person work out (you know who). All the physical fitness and training does not mean we still can’t be injured or that we will physically fail at some challenges, but we are way better prepared for those challenges and preventing those injuries than if we did the minimum or nothing at all. The same applies in choosing to be mentally strong versus mentally lazy. At CAFMA, we are committed to excellence. Striving for excellence includes a hunger to be looking at our weaknesses to create plans of improvement – individually and as an organization. Again, not easy – humbling and painful at times - but necessary to become better than yesterday.

I am hopeful that we will work on our mental strength as much as our physical strength.

“May we never lose our way.”