

#49 (KRISTEN ZIMAN)

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Jerry Ratcliffe:

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

Kristen Ziman was the police chief in Aurora, Illinois, when a mass shooting took the lives of five factory workers and injured five of her officers. We talk about her new book, being the first woman to lead her department, and the resilience necessary to see her department through the aftermath of a mass casualty event.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is Reducing Crime. I'm your host, Jerry Ratcliffe. As the podcast enters its fifth year - if long time listeners can believe that - I decided to change up the theme tune. The old theme was the outro that played over the closing credits for classic 1970s British cop show, *The Sweeney*. What you just heard was the far more exciting intro theme for the same show. Too exciting? Let me know your thoughts on Twitter @Jerry_Ratcliffe. We'll stick with it for a couple of episodes and see how we feel.

A couple of weeks ago saw the release of a new book, *Reimagining Blue: Thoughts on Life, Leadership, and a New Way Forward in Policing* by Kristen Ziman. Kristen was police chief in Aurora, Illinois, when in February 2019, a former employee walked into one of the city's manufacturing companies and murdered five people. Responding officers arrived within four minutes and a gun battle ensued.

The perpetrator was finally shot and killed by police, but not before four officers sustained gunshot wounds and the fifth was hit by shrapnel. Like myself, Kristen joined policing as a 17-year-old cadet. She spent her 30-year career with the Aurora police department in Illinois, during which time she was the first woman lieutenant, the first woman commander, and eventually the first woman chief. Having done her 30, she recently retired and is a sought-after public speaker on leadership and resilience, and she's still heavily involved in policing policy. I got an advanced read of the book and as the blurb says, it's a raw and honest portrayal told about a noble profession suffering an identity crisis.

She sneaked out of a meeting with the International Association of Chiefs of Police to join me in a coffee shop just around the corner from their offices to talk about being a pioneer for women in her department, the mass shooting,

REDUCING CRIME PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

her father, also a police officer who ended his life with his own service weapon, leadership, and a whole bunch of stuff. As you join us, we are just chatting before the coffee arrives and taking in the cafe's ambience, if you can call it that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I came up here because it was just around the corner, but I walked in and thought, this is the weirdest place.

Kristen Ziman:

It is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

They do bubble tea, but they're playing kind of soft cafe jazz in the background.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's like, they've decided they have no idea what genre they're going for.

Kristen Ziman:

They're just going to go for it all and see what sticks, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Exactly. Yep.

Kristen Ziman:

I like it. What made you decide to start the podcast?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So I wrote a book called Reducing Crime: A Companion for Police Leaders.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It does get occasionally cited, which surprises me because it's the least academic book I could think I could write.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because the Philadelphia police department put one of my old books called *Intelligence-Led Policing* on the promotion exam. And I think they thought they'd be doing me a favor. And the only reason I learned about it is that I had a Sergeant once say to me in Philly, "I had to read your fucking book."

Kristen Ziman:

Oh my gosh, that's great. You're like, "you're welcome."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I was like ...

Kristen Ziman:

Thank you so much.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thanks. I'm like seriously, why would they put that book on the exam? It was written for academics. It's brutal. So this book, *Reducing Crime*, is like half the size.

Kristen Ziman:

Okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Written in English. It's got pictures and different colors and vignettes. And I tried to write a book for cops and I thought, well, if I'm going to support that, why don't I support it with a podcast?

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know? Here I am four years down the line.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean it's only once a month, but it's good fun. And I meet some great people like yourself who've got ideas. Who have prepared to be vulnerable, put yourself out there. You know, reading your book was fascinating.

Kristen Ziman:

Did you read it?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Talk about vulnerability.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

That's exactly what that is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What sort of feedback have you got?

Kristen Ziman:

When I first started writing it, I was not writing it for anyone. There was not a particular audience I had in mind because it's not a cop book. When you read it's a memoir. It's about a troubled childhood. It's about leadership. It's about failures. Many of which, I have, you know, failed forward.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that how we describe things these days?

Kristen Ziman:

Yes, yes. Failing forward. It's about lessons I have learned about leadership by what not to do by watching others and being a product of their subordinates and saying if I ever get into a position of leadership, I will never do what they did. And then it's about policing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

Wait a minute. This is not for the cop that you know, it is for sure it is, but it's also for other people. And I love that feedback because people just automatically assume it's a cop book and no, it's not.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To some degree. I think that is what makes some of the most fascinating television. I mean, I don't watch a lot of ... In fact I watch hardly any police stuff, because it's like, you can just sit there and spot the mistakes. But the really good police stuff tends to be first and foremost about human beings. And the policing just happens to be the mechanism by which we discuss the city or the drug markets or human interaction. It's merely a mechanism to discuss all these other things that are going on. Hill Street Blues was a great example of that, I think one of the great examples of that, where it was just about people.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Well and that's why it was important to me, is this is what we're suffering from right now, today, in this present moment. Not seeing each other as people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Whether you're a police officer or whether you are a person who lives in the inner city, we're not looking at each other. We're generalizing, we're stereotyping. And so I wanted to tell the story and I call it a misunderstood profession because I believe that it is. I believe that when you look into the hearts and minds of the majority of police officers, they are good people who want to be doing good things in their community. They are here to help.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, no, I'm sorry. I'm on Twitter and they're all racist, white supremacists, Nazi, baby killers.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. Exactly. They wake up in the morning and they just want to eat babies, you know?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yep.

Kristen Ziman:

I mean, yeah. Cannibals.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Every morning they wake up and think, who can I shoot today?

Kristen Ziman:

What unarmed person who is being completely compliant can I shoot today? To me, that's why the book became important to me is to tell a story of a flawed human who is a cop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In reading it. And we should mention the name of the book, in reading *Reimagining Blue*, what I thought was really interesting is that it's almost, you were destined to be a cop.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Your father was a police officer, and then you had all these experiences and your background. In reading it, I kind of felt like there was a sense of inevitability that you would join the policing profession.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. And that's all I ever wanted to do. I was one of those kids that knew exactly what they wanted to do and to be when they grew up with my father before me, who was a police officer, but my father was two very different people. He was a police officer by day and a raging alcoholic by night.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

A very troubled man, yeah. That came across.

Kristen Ziman:

Which makes me passionate about mental health and wellness for police officers. So having the experience I had with him helped me understand that we have to do something about this profession and the dirty little secret and the high suicide rate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

My dad blew his head off at 70 years old and the demons caught up with him.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you know the questions about how long he'd been carrying all that with him.

Kristen Ziman:

Right. A lifetime, right?

[child makes a noise in the background]

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's easy for you to say young lady.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's funny how we both ended up in the same place very differently. My father passed away when I was a teenager and I really needed to get out of the house, but we both ended up in policing as 17-year-old cadets, but you'd always known that you were going that way. And for me it was kind of like an afterthought and it's only after I joined, it was like, I really like this. I like the people I'm with.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah, no I've always wanted to do it. And that to me was the pinnacle, right? Just at 21 years old, I had reached my life goal. And if you had ever said to me in that moment that I would've become the Chief of Police in that organization, I would've laughed because there were no women of rank when I came on in my department. And so I didn't see that possibility or that visibility. And when you don't think something's possible or see something, you know, it's really not a part of your plan. And so I just was loving being a cop and then, you know, things change and I decided to pursue that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's also fascinating. You are not the first person to say this to me. I spoke recently to Jackie Sebire in the UK, who took 15 years before she had a supervisor that was a female supervisor. She ended up becoming the staff officer to Cressida Dick who just retired as the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in London. But 15 years before she had anybody that could mentor her from a female perspective.

Kristen Ziman:

Oh, for sure. When I became the first female Lieutenant in the history of my police department ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How many officers are there?

Kristen Ziman:

Over 300.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's incredible, if you think about it.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah, it is. It absolutely is. It tells a story. But I was so uncomfortable with the headlines because I was getting promoted with my colleagues who are males. I had come up with these men and they are just as competent, amazing men, but it was all about me. My whole career, I just wanted to be one of the guys. I just wanted to fit in.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

So it took me until I think I became a commander where I started to recognize the responsibility of being a first and why that visibility matters, which shows you how remedial I am, because you would've thought since I didn't have that role model and didn't see it, that I would welcome being that role model. But instead I was like, no, look away.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That notion of just being essentially one of the boys, I think sometimes it drives people to be the type of police officer that they don't naturally want to be.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I've been talking to people about that almost impossible metric, which is what is the ideal police officer.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And that culture drives, you know, to be one of the boys will take you down a certain path, especially in a male dominated business.

Kristen Ziman:

For sure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Did you feel that pressure to go that route?

Kristen Ziman:

I did. And I will tell you that men feel it too. And I didn't understand that until I started telling this story about my attempt to fit in. And then I started emulating the officers around me and that could be good or bad depending on which officers you choose to emulate.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

And I'm a 17 year old cadet and I'm riding with any cop that will let me. Like, "Hey, can I go on a ride along with you?" And it just so happened that these police officers were not necessarily the ones who should be putting forth the example to a young sponge. And so I started emulating the way they acted. As I look back, that's where I started to understand where I lost myself, what I call my street personality. I started to talk down to people instead of to people. And I judged people and I was very kurt and this is nothing like my actual personality.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh it's totally mine. I'm still like that.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. Yeah. And so but I started to think, okay, if I'm a cop, then I have to borrow power from my position. And I have to act as if I have power. Well then it started to click in me. As I started to watch the other police officers who were successful. Successful in that they treated people with human dignity and respect and still did their jobs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

Put handcuffs on them, you know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think we tend to venerate cops who don't demonstrate a lot of doubt. They seem to know what they're doing all the time. But then when you get into leadership positions, that's an area where more doubt is necessary because the problems are so more nuanced and complicated. And some of them are wicked problems that don't have easy solutions.

Kristen Ziman:

Well, first of all, yeah, to touch on your first point, there is a confidence that must be ... We call that command presence.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

Where we have to exude that or else, if you walk down to a scene and you know, didn't have any of that, no one would listen to you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No, it becomes the technical term, I think, is a cluster fuck.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. And so you have to have that certain nuance to be able to command a situation.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know, sometimes you have to be in that mode where it's task not ask.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's not all the time.

Kristen Ziman:

No, I was going to say is we have our yes people, our no people and our maybe people. And our jobs are to get people to yes. What we fail to do is tap into the greatest tool that we have as individuals, which is our human influence. But you mentioned as you move up into leadership positions, the fact that you do not know the answer or do not know what to do, I became chief and I led through a mass shooting, a pandemic, and civil unrest. And I can tell you, I did not know what I was doing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. But did you have any interesting things happen in your chief?

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. Well, the first couple years went swimmingly and then, you know, and then ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So you got lulled into a false sense of security. "I've got this."

Kristen Ziman:

I was like this Chief thing, you know, three years in, I was like, man, we're killing it. You know? And then ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

These guys at ICP making a big meal of it, yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. Anybody can lead during times of peace. But that is where as a leader and I have never felt shame in saying, guys, I need help. I do not know how to handle this. This is pandemic is brand new for me in my lifetime and in my leadership. I think as a leader, that to me is, and honestly, this is how I've made it through by saying, I'm not sure what to do here. And I will take the best idea. Whoever has it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. The mass shooting. I mean, it's ... This is the kind of thing that you wouldn't wish on anybody. This is only 2019.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

February, 2019. And it was a former employee and I'm not going to name him. Fuck him.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Walked in to the Henry Pratt company in ... It's in Aurora, Illinois. What does the company do?

Kristen Ziman:

It manufactures valve, you know, water valve.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No reason to think that this is going to happen.

Kristen Ziman:

No, he was working that morning. And he had gotten written up the night before ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's right.

Kristen Ziman:

For a very minor infraction. Not wearing his safety goggles on the plant floor, but this had been a series of minor infractions that he had been disciplined for. And at 9:30 that morning, he made a comment to his comrades that if he gets called into the office later that afternoon, that he was going to basically blow up everyone and take everyone down with him. And not one person reported that to a supervisor.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But he made those threats and stuff like that in the past, I believe to some degree.

Kristen Ziman:

He was angry. They dubbed him as this guy was angry all the time.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And of course there were lots of people in society like that.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So how do you ... You know.

Kristen Ziman:

Right. How do you know which one ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How do you pick the one. Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

... is going to commit a mass shooting.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah and then he ends up killing five people. Your officers turn up within four minutes, which is spectacular as a response rate. But then the whole scene takes about 90 minutes to unfold.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Well, first of all, after he can't find anyone in the plant, so he had shot five people, they run out. So he then sets up an ambush for the officers who are responding. And one by one shoots them. Five of them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. You got four officers hit and one was hit by shrapnel. Is that?

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh my goodness. Yeah. Crazy. One of the things that I was thinking about with this, your ex-husband ...

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Who you seem close to, you have some kids with.

Kristen Ziman:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And your current wife are both in the department.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. That's pretty Jerry Springer, isn't it? Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well. I wasn't going to go there.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But I'm just trying to think when you are hearing all this unfold on the radio, is this something that's crossing your mind?

Kristen Ziman:

Oh, every officer ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because Matt, your, your ex-husband was one of the responding officers.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. And he was with the cluster of three flanking the door, the two got shot.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So the father of your kids is rushing into ...

Kristen Ziman:

Father of my children is rushing in and my daughter, meanwhile, is calling, are you guys okay?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

And I can't tell her because I don't know that he's okay. Three of her four parents are police officers and you know, she's asking me, but I had this moment even before you know about my ex-husband and my wife, it was these people who are getting shot, their wives flashed into my head. I know their wives. I know their kids. I mean ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

I've been in this police department for 30 years. And then when I heard my ex-husband announced that he was on scene, I was having all of these thoughts, but then it has to be a switch. And I remember saying, stop, you have to focus. You cannot stay there. I can't stay in emotion. I can't work and operate in emotion. I had things to do with the scene. I had a role to play and I managed, and I don't know how I did it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

To flip that switch and just dive right into work. And, and it wasn't until it was actually later that my wife, Chris, texted me and said, I'm going in, because at this point, now this became a 90 minute manhunt for the shooter. And she said, "I'm going in." And I had that moment again. I sat there, I looked at the phone and I responded and I still have that text. And it says, "go kill that motherfucker."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Bring out my total nerd capacity here because in Star Trek, there is this training scenario called the kobayashi maru. But it's an impossible scenario that you can't win. And it's about sort of training people on leadership in impossible situations. This sounds like that.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You know. It's a shooting. You've got officers injured. You don't know where the shooter is. And now on top of this, you've got family members involved ...

Kristen Ziman:

Family. People I love.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Come on. At that point.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. Oh no. Yeah. It was, it was absolutely insane, but it didn't really hit me until later. There is a 13 minute video that I have of all of my officers getting shot by this monster. It wasn't until that moment that as I was editing this video, watching the bullet whiz by my children's father's head ... Took me 20 times to watch it before I stopped sobbing. So what, in the moment in the middle of it all, it was like, let's go get this motherfucker. And afterwards it was, I almost lost my family.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think, because you have the after action, you have the media to deal with. You've got all this afterwards. So it's not just a switch off for a moment. It's a switch off for an extended period of time. How much of a toll does that take on us? Because it's not normal. I mean our evolution is to deal with things as they happen.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because that's our fight, not flight, all of this kind of stuff. But you are having to suppress all of these emotions and all this kind of thing for an extended period of time.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's got to take a toll.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Well, and here is where I will say I failed epically. I think I did a great job of taking care of my police officers. That's all I wanted to do was make sure they were okay. And the families of the victims, I went to every funeral, tried to stay in contact with them and made sure that not only on the day of the incident that we had mental health professionals at the ready and we had already started building a culture of moving away from that machismo. You know, I'm not going to ask for help to it's courageous to ask for help. So we'd put all of these mechanisms in place. So the officers were doing a fantastic job asking for help and going in and talking to people. And one of them showed up at my house with a bottle of whiskey, you know, on the Sunday, after the shooting ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's always the solution. If in doubt, single malt scotch.

Kristen Ziman:

You know what? What, I tell you what ... You know what you need in the moment. And that is what that man, he brought his wife and they sat in my living room and I drank whiskey with him because that is what he needed in the moment.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If it works.

Kristen Ziman:

It works. I know, I don't condone that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not a long term solution.

Kristen Ziman:

Especially coming from ... Remember, you know, my raging alcoholic father, but you know, so I don't condone that as a long term. Yes. A solution. But what ultimately happened was I spent so much time putting energy into making sure everyone else was okay. And I didn't realize that in that process, I was not okay. Right. And because I didn't think I could be, I had to make sure they were okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Also ... I mean that could have impacted your kids.

Kristen Ziman:

Oh, I'm sure. Absolutely. Because I was at that point, still talking about it as, you know, the incident, the shooting incident and not talking about it at the level of emotion that it deserved, you know? And my ex-husband went and got help immediately. I mean, he did the right thing, you know, but for me ... And it wasn't until someone walked into my office as well and said, "Hey, are you okay?" You know? And I was like, yeah, I'm fine. You know? And they're like, "Okay, we just want to make sure you're okay. Because you're taking care of everyone else." And I was like, yeah, I'm totally fine.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. It's that kind of, yeah. I'm totally fine. Yeah. Don't ask, don't penetrate.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. They let me fake that, you know, and I was good at it though. I said, no, I'm great. I'm fine. Just make sure you guys are okay. And it wasn't until I broke down, you know, later it was when my son called me and one of our victims shooting victims was the same age as my son. And it wasn't until weeks later that I missed a call from my son. And it was that, that triggered me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

Because I immediately thought that child, that mother who lost her son, Trevor Wehner is his name, and he was killed on that day. She can never call her son back.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

And I missed a call from my son and I just ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What if that was the last call?

Kristen Ziman:

Oh, that's what did it. So it took that moment and I fell to my knees and I sobbed and I called my son and I just kept calling him until he answered. He was in college and he left class. And that was the moment, you know, and that couldn't have been great for him, you know, to have to manage me. But that's what it took. So it's ... The point here is that you do, you can think that you're okay, but your head tells you are and your heart tells a different story.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've now moved into spending a lot of time traveling and talking about leadership. And I was fascinated reading the book that I didn't know that Michael Nila was a captain of yours.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Who obviously runs Blue Courage, who's been trying to help a lot of police departments and their leadership teams deal more deeply with some of these issues beyond the kind of superficial leadership stuff, which I think is absolutely great.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Are the lessons from your experience, especially around, you know, a mass shooting event, but I suppose more broadly, especially being a woman leader in policing, have they come easily in terms of speaking to people talking about this?

Kristen Ziman:

Yes. And the reason is because I have ... I'm very comfortable in front of a crowd and it started as a young community oriented policing officer where I found my place in front of an angry neighborhood that was mad about crime happening or quality of life issues. And I learned early to have a voice in front of an audience.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, those skills are pretty useless now because there's no angry neighborhoods out there at all.

Kristen Ziman:

No one's angry. Everyone's so calm. So I cultivated that early on in my career, but the lessons of leadership, you know, Michael Nila, you mentioned, you know, was one of the ones that pushed me towards all of the schooling, the education I got.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But isn't that interesting. It's almost like you need a mentor in policing to say, "Hey, go and become more educated."

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Take that role. It comes back to that, what we were initially talking about. If you have a culture, that's pretty anti-intellectual.

Kristen Ziman:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You can get sucked up into that. And I know some departments where they almost wear their anti-intellectualism as a badge of honor.

Kristen Ziman:

They do. And they call it street smarts and you don't need any education or opposing thoughts. And to me, formal education and maybe let's not even call it formal. Let's not call it formal education because there are people who I don't believe that a degree makes you smarter. Are you ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I know lots of people with PhD's. I can completely agree with that.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. My point is well taken. But bettering yourself, are you learning different philosophies of policing? Are you bettering yourself? Because when you better yourself, then you better our profession.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So it's interesting that it's almost like having somebody else who was doing that like Michael and some other people in other departments almost gave you permission to go, "No, it's okay. I'm going to go and explore other ideas."

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. I've gravitated towards those mentors who have pushed me to education. You know, I had one Sergeant that had a book club, you know. And "Hey, if you guys want to read a book."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's fantastic.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. And I loved that, you know, because that, to me, I was thirsty for it. And I think that is exactly what we need to cultivate. If not just to open dialogue of ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, they could also listen to podcasts, couldn't they?

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. Listen to what a podcast.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What a great idea.

Kristen Ziman:

And that is now the evolution of books. People don't have time to read. And so people listen to podcasts, same thing. It's the, what data are you getting? What education are you getting? Is it an opposing position? Great. Let's talk about that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Instead of "I disagree with you and I don't want to hear from you." Wow. Tell me how you came to that idea that I truly do not understand.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

You know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. So you've been going around and doing a bunch of traveling and you've been, and one thing I had to laugh, I'm going to tell you this, because I laughed at your tweet where you were put up in a hotel where it was hosting a junior cheerleading competition.

Kristen Ziman:

7,000 cheerleaders.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Nobody tells ...

Kristen Ziman:

7,000.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Nobody ever tells you this when you start traveling and be, oh, it's so it's great for when you go traveling, you go to these great places. And I was just in Avila, Spain, which is a beautiful city, but they never put me up in a fucking hotel which was full of cheerleaders.

Kristen Ziman:

The level of shrieking, I mean the decibels ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh my god.

Kristen Ziman:

It was ... And flip flops down the hallway. I mean, very impressive acrobatic feats, but also very loud. I did not get any sleep during that stay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I can't imagine. I mean, I once stayed at a Marriott and I can't remember where it was, but I walked into the hotel room and they had the brochure has a picture of some lounges on a beach, you know, join the Marriott club and stay in these beautiful places. And I looked outside of the window and I was looking over the sort of the loading dock of the

local shopping mall. And there was a meth head beating the crap out of an industrial dumpster that had wronged him in some fashion. I'm going, this is not what the brochure looks like.

Kristen Ziman:

Not in the brochure. That is a bait and switch.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Travel. Right? It's entertaining. But when you're doing this and you're speaking to these groups, I mean, are these lessons ... Is it just passing on the experience or are there sort of structured ways that people really can learn the lessons? Because there's so much in the mass shooting, dealing with the incident at the time. So there's a lot to learn about how to manage that then dealing and managing the people afterwards and then dealing and managing yourself. I mean that's a lot to squeeze in to ...

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Come and talk for an hour.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah, it is. And that's why I can barely fit it in an hour. The epiphanies I had is that this conversation about, you know, shooting preparation and prevention, shouldn't be for cops. We can talk about operations. What went right, what to do, what not to do. But the true essence of this conversation needs to be with organizations. Like the one I just described in my own city where he basically called out what he was going to do and no one did anything about it. Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's going to be so many false positives. That's the problem. That's cause everybody can talk. Right.

Kristen Ziman:

But that's okay. Because I would rather delve into and find it a false positive. Then have five people killed.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. I mean that's surely a role for a broader scope of organizations.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Than just the police.

Kristen Ziman:

Oh that's and that's part of what my message is. I invite people to discard my event, insert your organization here, insert your employees, insert your people and now change your mindset. Change your paradigm. What is the boogeyman for you? Is it a mass shooting? What is the worst thing that could possibly happen?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, that's a cheerful way to look at it.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly. And people think, are you inviting bad Juju? But no, it's because once you have played this out in your mind, you now know how to better prepare for it. So my voice, I think, is really not for cops. It's for organizations because they are going to be the ones that prevent the next mass shooting by identifying a person that nine times out of 10, 99 out of a hundred, you can connect the dots backwards and say, gosh, we saw that coming with that guy.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But, but so much of that feels like it's hindsight bias. And I think the psych people are starting to build those kind of things with much better predictive capacity than we've had in the past.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The challenge is to get people to use them because I worry that so many police departments are not proactive in their thinking. If you're sort of proactive or intelligence-led, the officer driving out of the station yard should know whether he or she is turning left or right.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because if it doesn't matter, then they're just a reactive police department answering 911 calls. And I still worry that too many police departments are like that.

Kristen Ziman:

I agree. And but I also think, and I'll push back here a little bit, is the onus being on the police officers, right? They're going to respond to the mass shooting to the thing, insert the thing here, you know, look at 9/11, the greatest terrorist attack of our time. Who showed up? Cops and firefighters, black helicopters from the military did not fall from the sky.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm sure there's a conspiracy website that does say that ...

Kristen Ziman:

They probably were.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Black helicopters were all over the place.

Kristen Ziman:

They're responsible for it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

But my point here is that the onus is always on the police while I'm putting the onus on organizations to identify because you know who you sit next to in a cubicle that is about to implode. So I'd like a little bit of personal responsibility.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well I think also that you could spread that even wider, which is so many times when police get called to an incredibly difficult situation, it's because prior to that there's been a decade of failure in so many other organizations within our society.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely. And they're the last resort.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Mental health, homeless, you know, advocacy. Yeah. Education, the whole deal. One of the quotes that I enjoyed in your book, which was not actually yours, but I'm going to give you the credit for it is leadership is about disappointing people at the rate they can absorb.

Kristen Ziman:

Isn't that beautiful? God.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I like to think ... I had to reread that about four times to get my head around exactly what it was saying.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because it's almost the antithesis of all that RA RA RA, motivational speaker kind of ...

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stuff. And I love this because I'm the least motivational speaker kind of person, you know, it's probably due to being British. But I love that leadership is about disappointing people at the rate they can absorb.

Kristen Ziman:

Marty Linsky said that in a classroom at Harvard. I went to Harvard. I like to pause there and say ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good for you. Was it expensive? Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

For three weeks. So I was in a program at Harvard, state and local executives, and he was one of our instructors and I am a bright-eyed commander, of course read everything I can on leadership. And what I've learned about leadership is what I aspire to be, knowing I can never make it there, but the visionary ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You could go around a bookshop in an airport and find a thousand books on leadership.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely. And to me, leadership is something that you aspire to be, but you will never attain. But Marty Linsky stood in front of us and said those words and I thought, have you lost your GD mind? Leadership is about inspiring. It's about taking people to where they should go and they don't see it themselves. It's about the mission.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is sounding very Star Trek-y again.

Kristen Ziman:

It's so beautiful. And then I became the chief and then I understood. I knew that as long as I was making those decisions for the right reasons, at the right time, that there still was going to be someone disappointed, someone pissed off, someone who disagreed. We're never ready for parenthood, for marriage, for, you know, the next promotion, for the

new job. You have to get ready when you're in that seat. And even though we prepare for it, we're never quite ready. We haven't learned the nuances of the job and it was in that moment, those words made perfect sense to me.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So explain it.

Kristen Ziman:

Leadership is uncomfortable. It's about making decisions that are best for your organization and it might create some discomfort for those in your organization because that's what change does. Look at policing now.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

One of the examples that brings to mind, which is that I think over the couple of years, shy of 40 years I've been involved in policing in some fashion, is different attitudes towards gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, et cetera. That has changed hugely so that I see young police officers now completely comfortable with colleagues of every and every sexuality going. And that was not the case when I started. A lot of people struggled in policing to be themselves in that kind of environment. And that's one of the changes.

Kristen Ziman:

You know, and I'll add another layer to that is women as well, because what traditionally, when I first became a Sergeant, I was overseeing men who had been in the profession for 20 plus years and did not like answering to a woman. Well then the younger officers, they've only seen their mothers in workforce in the workforce.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. I laughed because one of the objections that I remember from back in the dark ages and the neolithic era was that, you know, one of the things was, oh, women are not strong enough to do the job, that old bullshit, right.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I laughed when I read your story about chasing like a six foot three guy from a traffic stop who had warrants out for him. Because even though you're at five foot four, I mean, I'm looking at you now. You're like a hundred pounds soaking wet.

Kristen Ziman:

But I'm super tough. Don't let my appearance fool you.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you basically grabbed this guy and grabbed hold of him and he just kept going. And that was funny.

Kristen Ziman:

Kept going.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you resolved it in a really interesting way.

Kristen Ziman:

The, the only thing I had on my tool belt to use was my gun. And in that moment he was not armed. I had not seen anything that where I felt my life was in danger. Okay. That's off the table. I'm going to have to use my words. And it was in that moment that I just said, look, dude, I know you can kill me. It was a survival strategy by the way. But also vulnerable to say, I know that you can overpower me. Here I am, a cop. Right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

And he responded to that in a way, he literally stopped. I just said, listen, you're got, you're not going to gain any street cred by beating up a baby cop. You know? And I'm sure I wasn't as articulate as I was riding his back, but the dude just stopped. And what he said to me was nobody's ever just talked to me before. And that's when I started paying attention. Even the biggest and baddest cops, the ones who would just talk to people ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Kristen Ziman:

Did not borrow power from their position or their physicality and just use human influence, and they were the most successful. They talked people into handcuffs.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The tagline about this, which I think is also great, as you're walking back to the car, he points out a potentially career ending, little drama for you.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. I literally got him in handcuffs and went to grab my radio to notify all the other cops who were looking for me that I had him in custody and my radio was gone. And he said, you dropped your radio back there. And the man, while he was in handcuffs, led me to where my radio was and I picked it up. And of course, you know, I was badass, you know, "subject in custody."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I love the way you dropped your voice, just for that.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. "Subject in custody."

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's like your airline pilot voice, isn't it.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. But what a lesson learned. And I'm so glad I learned that early in my career because it changed the trajectory of how I treated people.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People will do bad things.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But we are not the arbiters of that. That's what the courts are there for people. Aren't bad all the time. You build relationships with people. You never know when they're going to remember it and they step in. This is where I have a bit of time for a lot of the procedural justice training.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because it's, you know, I think it's been sold that this is the right thing to do. No, sell it as this is building relationships with people, you may be helping the next cop out.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. I agree.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

By building a relationship, you may be helping the next cop out when that guy doesn't take a swing at them.

Kristen Ziman:

That's so interesting that you bring that up because I often hear these skills called soft skills, right? Communication, compassion, empathy. And yet, when you really look at what these skills bring, it's officer safety, it truly is deescalating that other person from harming you. And so I argue vehemently that you can call them soft skills, but these are survival skills. Yeah. You know, and just showing a little bit of compassion and God forbid vulnerability.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

I believe that they will save you or to your point, the next person that interacts with that person.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've been doing work with transit cops. And there's actually a lot of community policing goes on even around subway stations because you have a community of people around there and the ones that build relationships, you can just see at some point, if things go south, they may have a bit ... Somebody may step in and help or at the very least not step in to pile on.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And these small things make a difference building relationships.

Kristen Ziman:

I agree. And like you said, I call it cops and robbers. There's always going to be crime.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Thank goodness. Otherwise we would be unemployed.

Kristen Ziman:

We would be unemployed. Right. Job security.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't know what the hell I would do otherwise. Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Job security. But people are neither all good, nor all bad. Unless you are, you know, bonafide psychopath. Right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I feel seen.

Kristen Ziman:

Good. And you can point to why they are the way they are. Right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

The product of their upbringing, their environment, it's all ... It's textbook, especially to, you know, a guy like you. And listen, we still have to do our jobs. That doesn't mean that we're soft and we're not going to turn our heads. You know, there's accountability that matters. Just like I think cops should be held accountable.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

Just like cops should be held accountable, so should members of the community. And that's what our job is.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Kristen Ziman:

It's called law enforcement. Right. We still have to enforce the law.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yep.

Kristen Ziman:

That's not sexy, you know, so it's not sexy, but it has to be done. But I believe it can be done.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Somebody once said that policing is a necessary evil.

Kristen Ziman:

It is. Look at our democracy. When left to its own devices, we will have vigilante justice. We need the rule of law. And I think that's right now where our society is falling. Okay. We tried that whole defund and you know, abolish and the

police took a step back. And to your point, you know, turned left or right, they didn't know they were just showing up. Right. And where does that get us? Violent? Crime is up 30%.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Some cities are seeing more homicides than they've ever seen before.

Kristen Ziman:

Listen, I mean, in my profession, we call that a clue. You need the rule of law.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You'd never be a sociologist, you know, choosing to ignore all those lessons here.

Kristen Ziman:

Yes. I know. I just, I'm, I'm into logic.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Careful. Now, dangerous territory, this.

Kristen Ziman:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

All this thinking, where's it going to get you.

Kristen Ziman:

You know, the word reform insinuates this complete overhaul. Listen, I started my career with the Rodney King incident. I ended my career with the George Floyd incident. If you looked at the two bookends of my career, you would not assume that change has taken place. And yet we've developed body cams. And by the way, this is before George Floyd, I mean, good progressive chiefs that have genuinely committed to making their law enforcement team better have committed to these things. Mental health and wellness for their police officers, deescalation training, all of the things that were demanded of us after George Floyd, I've been doing that for 10 years at my police department base and my predecessor started that. So to say we need a complete overhaul is not factual in my opinion.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I spoke to Bill Bratton and he said, "I'm a reformer."

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think the issue is that people on the outside who don't have a good sense of the changes, don't get it. And they don't see the inside of policing. There are lots of performers who are moving policing forward.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But they just don't see it because they're not involved.

Kristen Ziman:

Correct. And then the headlines don't help. Right. Those few incidents don't help now. Arguably they're big incidents. So there's no defending those.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No.

Kristen Ziman:

But gosh, the thousands ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But you can't judge a profession that has 60 to 70 million police community interactions a year.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

By the three or four videos you see every month ...

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

On YouTube.

Kristen Ziman:

Without a doubt.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I also think that because policing is conducted in the public eye, it has been forced to be more reform-oriented than many other professions.

Kristen Ziman:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'd love to see surgeons wearing body worn cameras for every surgery and make those public.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think we'd be horrified in some cases.

Kristen Ziman:

I think you're right. And I think judges should wear body cams and states attorneys. I mean, when you talk about ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Prosecutors, when they're making the decisions about whether they can prosecute a case or not.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We should be able to see those decisions.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. But so we're always going to have people that are going to commit crimes, but it's, to me, it's about holding people accountable and we need to hold police accountable and our society.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Finding that balance.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah. It's very difficult, but it's necessary. And there are great cops out there that can do it. And I believe in them.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Absolutely. You know, I've been lulled by this gentle ...

Kristen Ziman:

Jazz.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. This cocktail hour, jazz piano playing in the background.

Kristen Ziman:

Is this a strip club. Where are we?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Fantastic. Unfortunately, they're about to wrap up and close, so we better wrap up, but ...

Kristen Ziman:

I can talk to you all day because this doesn't even feel like it's being recorded.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No this has been ...

Kristen Ziman:

I love your brain.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This has been super fun. Thanks ever so much for doing this. What's next for you?

Kristen Ziman:

I don't know. For the first time, you know, I was with my department for 30 years and I left a little early before I turned 50. I'm 48 and I left because I really felt I could be more impactful in the law enforcement world.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're here at an IACP meeting. So you're still clearly wanting to be involved.

Kristen Ziman:

Absolutely. I am very much involved with the international chiefs for sure. But my voice right now is important, I think, to spread the message of preparation culture, leadership. And so that's what I'm doing right now. And I'm very lucky because people are asking me to speak. I know that is a gift and it probably won't last forever. So I'm conscious of that, but they keep asking me to speak. I'm going to keep doing it. I will say I get little pangs. When I get a phone call that

says, "Hey, would you consider, you know, putting in for this chief's job?" And I have those moments and you know, when the right one comes along, I can't promise that I won't pursue that. I don't know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And is the idea that, I mean, I felt it when I left the job from what you think is going to be your career future all laid out. And then I had a mountaineering accent and that was the end of my career.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And in equal parts, I found it daunting and exhilarating.

Kristen Ziman:

From a person who has always had her life plotted, planned ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Structured.

Kristen Ziman:

Where I was ... I am a ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You knew where you going.

Kristen Ziman:

I am a person of structure. I do not jump without a net. I'm free falling. And honestly that's a great word. It's exhilarating because I have now opened myself to experiences in speaking at organizations that have taught me so much. Never would've predicted that. So I'm enjoying the free fall right now and I don't know where I'm going to land.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's great.

Kristen Ziman:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it's been great chatting to you. Thanks very much for spending some time with me.

Kristen Ziman:

What an honor to be on this ...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, please.

Kristen Ziman:

Famous podcast. No, gosh, this is great.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 49 of Reducing Crime recorded in Washington, DC in May, 2022. A link to Kristen's book can be found at reducingcrime.com/podcast, where you can also find transcripts of this and every episode. New episodes are announced on Twitter at [@_ReducingCrime](https://twitter.com/_ReducingCrime), or you can just subscribe so you don't miss any episode. Instructors, DM me there for support materials.

Be safe and best of luck.