Building a World That Doesn't Exist: Addressing Sexual Violence through Culture and Climate Change

"If we want to change things, we must first change ourselves. If we want to play – if we want to change the world – we must first show up on the field to score."
- Paul Rusesabagina

In our current environment, we recognize the distinction between culture and climate. While social culture often operates beyond our control, we have the ability to positively influence the climate within our organizations. We exist in a world where sexual violence is prevalent at various levels, and it is imperative that we commit ourselves to driving meaningful change. This effort will necessitate a united front—an army of dedicated individuals determined to turn the tide.

This presentation will analyze the key social risk factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence and explore potential protective factors that can help mitigate these risks.

Real transformation occurs incrementally—brick by brick—and begins with our own wellness. We will examine our ethical obligation to foster professional wellness and cultivate healthy organizational environments. Many first responders endure vicarious trauma and other detrimental effects while operating in settings that are often toxic and traumatic. The question before us is: how can we create positive change under these conditions?

We will also critically assess the role of the media and entertainment industry in shaping cultural beliefs about sexual violence. Through an analysis of mainstream media, pornography, and online gaming, we will highlight how these platforms contribute to prevailing attitudes.

Sex offenders thrive in a culture that accepts rape myths and normalizes sexual violence. This presentation will delve into the societal myths and biases that allow these individuals to operate with impunity. We will explore their deceptive strategies, the motivations behind their actions, and how we can cultivate awareness to expose their heinous acts.

It is essential to understand that sexual assault victims do not merely witness these crimes; they endure them, and the repercussions can be profound. We will discuss the latest insights from neuroscience regarding sexual trauma and propose improved response strategies. By enhancing our responses, we aim to increase reporting rates and, ultimately, justice for victims.

Our approach will be rooted in education, theoretical frameworks, promising best practices, and rigorous research, all aimed at intentionally shifting our culture to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the likelihood of sexual assault in our society.

While we acknowledge the significant work that lies ahead, it is important to recognize the progress we have made. There is much to celebrate, and the criminal justice system is evolving positively, thanks to the commitment and efforts of individuals like those present in this room. Together, we can continue to advance this critical mission.

Learning Objectives:
- Explore the historical and contemporary mainstream cultural messages around sex and hooking up
- To explore technology and its role in modern sexual violence
- Identify rape myths that enable sex offenders to thrive in our society
- Understand the impact and neuroscience of sexual assault
- Define culture change and implement actions to create positive change