



# Ten years since 9/11: Searching for proactive heroism

In a crisis, most of us just stare, immobilized in fright or horror, yet they respond with a sense of unrivaled bravery. Often unrecognized, they are among us in our everyday activities. They are our first responders. They are our heroes. Author Joseph Campbell once said, "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."

Ten years ago, more than 400 heroes

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lost their lives in the events of Sept. 11, 2001. If we hope to one day achieve excellence in incident prevention and response in our global society, we must recognize these heroes not just posthumously but proactively as well. When was the last time you personally thanked a first responder without an event prompting you to do so?

We all remember where we were that

day, and how the events intertwined with our own lives. I was on my way to my office in Houston, where I was to finish preparations to visit an organization in the upper floors of the North Tower of the World Trade Center. I began to think of my formative years in New Jersey, where school trips frequently took us into the city for a bit of culture, arts and history. I will always cherish my memories of visiting the World Trade Center in the 1980s.

When flying into one of the airports around New York City, I used to look for the Twin Towers as my beacon within the landscape. Ten years later, as my wife and I arrived into Newark Airport Sept. 9 to participate in the city-wide remembrance of the 10-year anniversary, I was again reminded of this void.

Walking around the complex that had been the World Trade Center, it was such a contract to my memories. I had visited the site since 2001, but nothing could have prepared me for the emotional toll the 10-year anniversary would bring. First responders and representatives from our nation's fire and police departments,

along with grieving family members and friends, could be found in and around the site. News crews were abundant, capturing stories of family and friends of those lost during that appalling morning of 9/11. Every story I heard was just as tragic as the next.

### Lessons learned

I hope what we learn from these stories is not limited to politics or religion, but we recognize the need for situationally practical protocols and uniformly understood procedures for incident response. Additionally, we need to realize training on these life-saving strategies should become a part of orientation for any employee. At minimum, contractors and visitors should also be provided with briefings on policies and points of contacts, prior to access. One might feel this is going too far. However, first aid, a fundamental skill taught in basic training in the United States military, is rarely taught to personnel, unless sought out, even in the most dangerous industries.

To me, a hero is one who, despite

all odds, does what feels right, even if it means standing alone in the rain. I have met many such individuals in companies throughout the world. The challenge often isn't in prompting their action, but in providing them with the skills to know what to do, both proactively and reactively. We should continue to make efforts that lead to the prevention of death, rather than only remembering those who were among the fallen.

A vital element of any effective safety program is excellent incident response. I know I honestly wouldn't have been prepared if I had been in that tower on that fateful morning.

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