

L.D. Louis:

I've been a prosecutor for 22 years. Right now as prosecutors and public safety professionals in general, there's a lot of negative energy surrounding the role of the prosecutor. Many individuals perceive us not as a part of the solution, but a part of the problem. And so there are ways, though, that we can rebuild trust with our community. I think one of those key ways is for our community to be able to see prosecutors reflecting compassion and empathy as they are administering justice. And so that really means seeing individuals and appreciating that these individuals that are defendants, have family members, have children, have community showing empathy and compassion. When we engage with defendants in the administration of justice, it builds trust and confidence by our community members that we are going to do the job the way they want it done.

What we don't want is to see the revolving door recidivism that's costly both to the community in terms of tax dollars, but also to potential individual victims. And so if our goal is to see these folks rehabilitated and reintegrated, then we want to do our best to encourage them towards success through alternatives to incarceration. The issues, the concepts in behavioral health are the underlying causes, the root causes for why individuals become justice involved. And so if we want to push these folks away from the criminal justice system and reintegrate them into society, then we need to understand the motivating factors, and our best tool for that is behavioral health concepts.

If we don't want this individual sinking deeper into a hole, is it more valuable, is it more effective in terms of crime reduction and increase to public safety to send that individual to grief counseling because they're self-medicating with alcohol as a result of their loss? Or should we engage in traditional prosecution methods, which is probation, DUI school, that type of engagement? And what I've found is that we're less likely to see these individuals come back into the criminal justice system if we attack what brought them into the system in the first place. What caused the behavior? This idea of a one outcome fits all, it's not effective.

I think when we look at behavioral health concepts, we're moving in a direction towards solutions that are more likely to get the outcome that we want, which is a safer community, which is individuals who are contributing and reintegrated into our community. And if we keep that in mind as we do our work, as we think about diversion and alternatives to incarceration that we represent the people, I think that helps to point us in the right direction in terms of how to go about this work and how to think about and talk about our work. As problem solvers, as guardians of public safety, what are the best tools that we can bring to bear to make our community safer and make sure we're not limiting ourselves only to our traditional tools, which are very important, but also to some of these new tools that can help individuals more successfully reintegrate.