

Dr. Belinda (Bel) Pedroza - The Proven Analyst

Mindy: [00:00:00] Welcome to Analyst Talk with Jason Elder. It's like coffee with an analyst, or it could be whiskey with an analyst, reading a spreadsheet, linking crime events, identifying a series, and getting the latest scoop on association news and training. So please don't be that analyst and join us as we define the law enforcement analysis profession, one episode at a time.

Thank

Jason: you for joining me. I hope many aspects of your life are progressing. My name is Jason Elder and today our guest has six years of law enforcement analysis experience, 11 years of law enforcement experience overall. She has worked with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, the Texas Department of Public Safety, Webb County Sheriff's Office, And now Fugerville Police Department.

She is the Regional Director for the Texas Gang Investors Association. And she's also the Vice President of Ayalea's Lone Star Chapter. She recently got her PhD. She's known as the Gang Analyst. Please welcome Dr. Belinda Pedroza. [00:01:00] Bel, how are we doing? Good, how about yourself? I am doing well. So you sent on your resume Belinda, so I used Belinda, even though you told me that no one knows you as Belinda, it's Belle.

Bel: That's correct.

Jason: . So we got a lot to go over today. Obviously, we're going to be talking about Texas and we're going to be talking about gangs. But before we get to all of that, how did you discover the law enforcement analysis

Bel: profession? It's actually pretty interesting how I came across it. I was at the time working as a corrections officer with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, so the Texas prison system, and I don't want to use the word bored, but I essentially got bored.

I actually liked going to school. I was one of those that liked being a student, and I started looking at possible degrees for my master's. And I came across my university, so Tiffin University in Ohio, and they had a master's program specifically for crime analysis. [00:02:00] And the more research that I did, I became super interested in it.

And that's kind of how I became involved in the realm of crime analysis is actually through my

Jason: education.

when you first start in law enforcement, how did you get involved? So

Bel: when you graduate with your criminal justice degree you start applying for positions and everybody wants you to have experience, but nobody's essentially willing to hire you so that you can gain that experience.

And so I had a friend who was a corrections officer at the time and I was he went to a different university. In Huntsville, Texas, and he started telling me how he was still going to school and was a CEO, and he told me, you know, you should apply, you should come and work in Huntsville, even though I wasn't from the area and that's kind of how I got involved in the realm of the criminal justice system professionally and in [00:03:00] law enforcement was because I needed a job after graduating and while I did not foresee myself as a corrections officer, I actually really enjoyed it.

Jason: When you're first starting , when you're first going into the doors, what are some of the things you think of when you think back during this time?

Bel: You know, if you've ever met anybody who has been incarcerated, that door slamming behind you is really, really powerful.

And It may not be as powerful for us as it is for them because they're living there, you know, 24 7, 365, that door slamming behind you really brings you into the reality of what you're involved. It's a whole different world being behind the walls. of a prison. It's literally its own community, but with more stringent roles, not for us necessarily, but for them.

And we are responsible for the safety and security of not just the offenders, but of the facility and of each [00:04:00] other.

Jason: , what are some of the things that you struggled with? What are some of the things that you actually excelled

Bel: with the job?

Well, as a female, I worked in a male penitentiary.

So with that came its own battles not just with the male offenders, but also with my male coworkers. I was 22 when I started working for TDCJ and, you know, I, I don't want to call myself that I had a baby face, but I definitely looked younger. And, you know, when you're in that kind of environment, just like with officers that are working their beat, they want to be able to be sure that their partner has their back.

And sometimes. You know, you see somebody who looks young, who is young, and you think that they are not willing to put in the same amount of work, or to potentially put their life on the line to have your back, and so I had to prove myself, not just to myself, I had to prove myself to my coworkers, my male coworkers, my [00:05:00] supervisors, and I had to prove myself to you.

They're looking for those who they can turn to their side. And that can be a variety of things. So it, it was a constant battle within myself and to realize it, not to take it personal because I wasn't the only female working there, but I had to realize that I had to prove myself to everybody else on a daily basis.

My first facility wasn't as difficult simply because we had. Offenders that were assigned to that facility. So those same offenders saw me every single day that I was there. When I got to my second facility, it was a diagnostic facility. So we had offenders that were coming in temporarily and I was having to prove myself to myself and to the offender population that I will.

be respected as an individual, but I will also be [00:06:00] respected as a corrections officer. And so the last two and a half years of my time with TDCJ, though I had an extremely good working relationship with everybody there and with my warden, who I still talk to to this day, it was all of us from that unit having to prove ourselves.

and having to set that initial experience with an offender who's just starting their time with the Texas prison system.

Jason: Do you got any stories that you'd like to tell during this time?

Bel: There's honestly so many stories some of them are really funny because it involves me, I don't want to say getting injured, but not paying attention to where I'm walking and I walk straight into a like a windowsill.

There are experiences that I've dealt with that, you know, I can't speak too much about simply because of the position that I was in. I was the, what was known as the safe prisons. So PRIA stands for the Prison Rape [00:07:00] Elimination

Act, which was signed into law in 2003. And so I did investigations of sexual assaults of offenders.

Unfortunately, that's what happens in the prison system. TDCJ has zero tolerance policy, however. We understand that in that world it unfortunately happens. So in that aspect, those were confidential investigations. I can't really get into any of it. And then I was, that's where I started my, my gang career as a gang investigator was actually in the prison system.

And if you look back on history of Texas gangs, a lot of it starts from the Texas prison system. Our major gangs here in Texas. The history of gangs in Texas is actually the prison system. So that was always super interesting to be involved in that. But yeah, there, there are some stories, some funny stories.

There are some really horrible stories. We had two officers that were killed [00:08:00] within my time with TTCJ. And even though it wasn't on my facility, when one officer was killed, it impacted all of us. And we had to within one year apart. So, you know, there's a variety of stories, and I don't know if we have enough time today to go over probably some of the good ones, but there, there is a lot that happens within those walls that stays within those walls for a variety of reasons, right, confidentiality, sometimes people don't want to know what's really happening behind the walls but I've made a lot of good friends From working TTCJ, I still talk to a good number of my co workers, and I miss it.

That surprises people when I say that, but I actually do miss it. , my gray family, because our uniforms were gray I, I miss it sometimes. I, I enjoyed my time there though it may seem like very little, it felt like four or five times that actual amount of time.

Jason: Yeah, I've talked to folks that [00:09:00] worked in similar Correctional facilities, as you described, and one guy, he said something to me one time.

He said, you have a whole variety of types of people that are in corrections. And of course, you're always leery of the ones that. If you might be a direct threat to you, he said, but you know, there's some guys in there that are like, so kind and so, so congenial and easy to talk to and whatnot that it said it was, it was mind blowing that he would go from like one cell where he had to be on.

Like high alert to the other one where he was just talking to the, you know, neighborhood Joe that everybody knows it's been in there forever and never

hurts a fly type of thing. And he said that that was just messed with his mind a lot while he was in there. Dealing with all these different types of people.

Bel: Yes, that's very [00:10:00] true. I've dealt with it was actually a father son pair. The father was in TDCJ, the son was also in TDCJ, and they were housed together. And they were super respectful. Yes ma'am, no ma'am. A lot of the offenders didn't know how to pronounce my last name. And so to make it easy, I essentially gave them permission.

because in policy offenders are not supposed, not supposed to call you anything other than your name or like man and sir. And so I gave them permission to call me Miss P. So my last name is Pedroza and it starts with a P. I was like, let's just make it easier and call me Miss P. And so, you know, there were those offenders that You know, yes ma'am, no ma'am, yes miss P, no miss P, but at the end of the day, I realized that I was one against 500 on any given time, and I never let my guard down, no matter how [00:11:00] respectful, how nice, how older, or how younger they were, because at the end of the day, At any at a split of a second they can change because they're there 24 7 365 days out of the year and I go and I do my time for the day and I get to walk out and I get to go home and I sleep in my own bed and I shower and I don't share my clothes and so that can be a very weird environment for People who are have this mindset that everybody who's behind the walls are just extremely rude or extremely aggressive and they are going to tell you that they're going to kill you, and then , they see these, they interact with these, if you want to call them nicer offenders.

It can mess with you. But I think if you go in. To this profession in corrections with the mindset that [00:12:00] let your no be mean no, you can't turn your yes to a no, and you must be professional at all times. I think that will help anybody within this profession. I've been asked before. What do you mean?

It's harder to turn your yes to a no, then you're no to a yes. Because once you tell an offender yes, and you can't deliver it, it puts you in this position that, it, it, it's kind of hard to explain, but offenders are not biggest fans of hearing yes, kind of like kids. Right? You tell them yes, and then all of a sudden you tell them no.

What happens? It's kind of like that. So, you know, I was a big proponent of I'm going to tell you no every single time, but if I can turn it into a yes, I will, but I'm not going to tell you that I can turn it to a yes, because I wanted to make sure that I didn't make promises that I couldn't keep whether I said I promised or I didn't.

Jason: I do want to move off the corrections topic, but before we do, if you were made either [00:13:00] a warden or given a position of power, what would be something that you would like to change with the correction system?

Bel: I think that's very, that's a very. Broad question.

Jason: Well, you can box it in box it in if it, if it helps you. Well,

Bel: I think that's, that's still very broad simply because the prison system in Texas is not the oldest in the United States, but it's pretty old. Started with the Huntsville unit in 18. Don't quote me on this.

I think it's 48 or 84. I know there's a four and an eight in there somewhere. And you know, I used to work at that facility. And. There were, at one point, I believe, 109 facilities during my time working for TDCJ. Unfortunately, in order to change the infrastructure, it would cost millions, if not billions, of dollars.

I think one of the things that's I could change and I had the ability to change would also cost money , [00:14:00] is the pay for corrections officers. It is not the most favorable position by any means in any of the criminal justice system professions. They deal with convicted felons, convicted murderers.

And their pay is not well reflected of that. There's also a lot of turnover. And so, because working in corrections, it's not for everybody and that's okay. But I think if there's one thing, if I had the power and I had an unlimited amount of resources would be to pay the corrections. Profession, security wise, more money simply because of what they do and what they deal with on a daily basis.

Jason: So let's move on to you becoming an analyst then you start your analyst career with the Texas Department of Public Safety.

So let's talk about how you got

Bel: there. Okay. Well, I, by the time I started looking for positions I was [00:15:00] about, if you want to do a number over 90% done with my Maybe 75% done with my degree. So I was almost there. And I realized, you know, maybe I should start looking for positions to be a crime analyst.

And so I started looking. I looked for TDCJ also has analysts within the Office of Inspector General. But, you know, in Texas, the premier law enforcement

agency, angled with the TDC. is the Texas Department of Public Safety. When you think of Texas DPS, you think of our state troopers or our Texas Rangers.

And so they had openings and I applied for it and I got it. I had to wait a little bit just because of the timing and I was going through an audit at my facility. But, and it was closer to home because I was at the time in Huntsville and It was about an eight hour drive from home, and so I moved to Austin and started as an analyst with DPS.

Jason: , what types of tasks are you getting into at

Bel: this time? So when I first [00:16:00] started, I was actually with what was then known as the Real Time Crime Center. And unfortunately, I got stuck on night shift or midnight. So I was 11 p. m. to 7 a. m. And so that was actually really rough.

I had never been on a night shift. I've done overtime on nights, but never my full. Eight hours be on a night shift. And so I was really responsible with assisting, you know, the fusion center with requests from other agencies, monitoring for any kind of events that could potentially impact Texas in any one specific way.

And so I was at the real time crime center with the fusion center for about eight months before I transferred to a another unit, which was over. Missing persons. I was there for about two months and, and the reason it was two months is because at the time the assistant chief had gotten [00:17:00] promoted to a regional director spot and had asked me if I would go and work for him at this other.

In another region, and I loved working for him. I, you know, growing up through TDCJ, that, that actually holds a lot of weight when one of your supervisors wants you to follow them. And so I did. I followed him to my final duty station, if you want to call it that, where I stayed until I left DPS and now being at the Pugetville Police Department.

Jason: I'm interested to know you're working in corrections dealing with a lot of people. You go become an analyst and I'm just wondering, did it, did it feel like something was missing because you're not really dealing with a lot of people, at least face to face with some of these real time crime centers, you're dealing with people on the phone, you're dealing with a lot of computer work, you might be working with some office coworkers.

But you're not dealing with that day to day [00:18:00] people that you, normally would have dealt with in, corrections. , was there an adjustment period there for you with, in

Bel: terms of that? Yes, there's actually still adjustments even now. , it was honestly DPS.

simply because within working as a corrections officer, I never liked people walking behind me. I never liked people standing behind me, whether I knew them or not, right? My back was always to the wall. And so when people would walk up behind me, you know, my immediate reaction was to turn around. And like, no, you can walk in front of me.

Probably a little bit more aggressive than they would have liked. You know and so there was a huge adjustment and even now there are, there's this word that likes to be referred to as people that have worked corrections and it is institutionalized. And yes, I am very much institutionalized.

There are you know, things that you do and say. When you're working in a corrections [00:19:00] environment that the average person does not understand. And so when you essentially go to, if you want to call it civilian life, or what we call the free world, it's a, it's a very hard transition that even to this day I still struggle with.

I don't like people walking behind me. I would rather you walk in front of me. My vernacular sometimes comes out and I can be very aggressive. Certain words that I say don't translate well. Simply because we had our own language in TDC and , it can be something as simple as, Hey, look out where I'm trying to catch your attention.

You know, that, that's super innocent, but some people are like, what do you mean? Look out, like, look out for what? It's like, no, like look out, excuse me, excuse me. And so, you know, I, I still struggle with that. And, you know, I reach out to my friends who still work in corrections because they understand me.

They understand we've all been [00:20:00] through the same thing to some degree, and Yeah, I still struggle with it. My friends see it who have seen me throughout my time are like, you still act like you work there and you don't. And I was like, that's not something that I can just turn off. I was only working in corrections for about four and a half years.

But those four and a half years felt like 40, and I don't know if I'll ever be able to completely shut down.

Jason: As you're saying this, I'm just envisioning you giving a very aggressive no, and your co worker saying, I just asked if you wanted a

Bel: donut. Yeah, I can be very aggressive sometimes and it's, it's not because I don't like the person or, you know, it's not my manners.

It's just, you know, there was a persona that you had to, you know, exude. In the prison system and it's not about, you know, I'm the biggest and baddest it is, you know, you will respect me and I [00:21:00] will tell you what to do, when to do it, how to do it because you are in here and I am responsible for your safety and security.

And so, yeah, it could be very interesting when I get people who have never met me and people see me in the same conversation and they're like, you know, that was a little aggressive, right? I was like, no, it wasn't though.

Jason: I'm not yelling. .

So I do want to move on to Fugerville, but before we do, , in terms of working for.

The Texas Department of Public Safety when you think about that time, is there a major accomplishment that you think of a story that you think of as you're learning the analyst trade, I guess, when you and you thinking back, what. I

Bel: would say being able to bring in my knowledge of gangs into my possession, my position as a crime analyst, I was able to use my knowledge and experience [00:22:00] as a gang investigator with TTCJ to bring that knowledge to especially the troopers.

Right. The troopers are the ones out on the road making these stops. And sometimes we forget that the troopers may not be able to be participating in these trainings, these specialized trainings of gangs all the time. And so I was able to use that knowledge that I had to be able to help these troopers.

To, to kind of learn what to look for, learn, you know, what questions to ask or how to ask them and, you know that was probably one of the best things that came because I was able to incorporate my corrections experience.

With my crime analyst experience. And I'm still friends with many troopers to this day. And they still call me, which I love that they, they see and they appreciate that experience that I have. And the fact that I was willing to [00:23:00] teach them actually saw a couple of them yesterday and they're like, we're still going to call you.

It's like, okay, just don't call me at night. Cause I go to sleep at night.

Jason: , . Obviously, your time working directly , with gangs , you learn all the trends, you learn everything that there is, but once you become an analyst, you can quickly lose your step in terms of knowing exactly what's going on with the gang situation.

So how did you, keep your gang knowledge sharp?

Bel: So. I was actually a member just a member with the Texas Gang Investigators Association or TGIA, and so I met a lot of people patrol officers, detectives, investigators who do it on the Thank you. You know, more law enforcement aspects of investigating gangs.

And so I was able to keep those contacts with them and become friends with many people. And so if there was something that I could help them with, they would [00:24:00] call me. And then in 2019 at the you know Pushing of my then major at the time, who was a region director for the central region kind of, you know, recruited me to run for another, the other, the second position.

And so through that, back in 2019, I was elected as the, the second central region director for TGIA and Being able to use my knowledge, training and experience as a CEO, working as a gang investigator, and then now as an analyst, I have been able to maintain and network and I've gone to trainings. And so I, I try to keep up with what's happening in.

In the gang world, whether it's street gangs, prison gangs, or OMGs. And I've been able to be a resource for many people, whether it's from my analyst side or my gang side. And then sometimes it's a [00:25:00] little bit of both, right? There's a there are some instances in which, you know, we're looking at tattoos and, you know, I'm, I'm looking at a photo of tattoos and I can.

You know, pinpoint. Hey, there's this that caught my attention could mean this. Hey, this is a known tattoo that's used by this specific gang. You may want to, you know, look into that. And so I've been able to incorporate it more recently than previously. And so, yeah, I'm still highly involved in it.

I've been able to coordinate, intel meetings with some of these agencies that are surrounding me because I've been able to network and they know that I know the people and they know that I'm passionate about this and, you know, I'm all about intel sharing. And so it's been very useful to be able to incorporate both aspects especially when you're talking about gangs and being able to be called to assist in an investigation that I may not necessarily be involved in, but because of my knowledge and [00:26:00] experience, I can help them.

Mary: Hi, this is Mary Bertuccelli. Would you like to solve a cold case? If your answer is yes, then enter a cold case from your agency into VICAP, the FBI's Violent Criminal Apprehension Program. Thanks.

Joshua: Hello, this is Joshua Todd, U. S. Border Patrol Buffalo Sector Intelligence at Wellesley Island Station, and I'd like you to remember that numbers on the page are reflective of the humans that we serve.

Bel: We've had a recent report of an overdose in the county, and we discussed it at a local meeting, and then later that day, I went to the barber who got a haircut, and the woman was visibly distraught, and we got to chatting, and it was actually her son that overdosed and passed away. So while we do a lot of reports and they are numbers on the spreadsheet, they end up reflecting the humans that we do serve.[00:27:00]

Jason: All right. So then how did you get from the Texas department of public safety to Pflugerville PD?

Bel: So I had been looking for a new position for a little bit, you know, it, there were certain aspects of working in the last detail that I was on. That, you know, I thought it was my time to kind of step away and working at the state level was very different from working at the local level.

And so I wanted that experience working at the local level. And so Pflugerville is just outside of Austin. And so they had a position that was coming open. Pay was great. It was actually more money. Not to say money is everything, but, you know, that plays a role in it. And so. You know, I, I put in for it.

They, they loved my experience, they loved what I was about because I wasn't just about sitting at a desk. I'm involved in a [00:28:00] whole lot of associations, right? So I've talked about Texas Gang Investigators Association, but I'm also the vice president for ILEA, the Lone Star chapter. I'm a member of IACA.

I'm a member of the International Latino Gang Investigators Association. I'm actually the Texas rep for them. I'm a member of the International Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Investigators Association. So, you know, it's not just about sitting at a desk. It's about networking and what is it that you're passionate about.

And so I had What the chief essentially envisioned because of the agency he came from, that my position could be not just a crime analyst, but my official title is actually crime intelligence analyst. So it incorporates both crime analysis and criminal intelligence analysis all into one position.

And so I really liked what it was about. I am currently the only analyst. However, the vision is to potentially bring in [00:29:00] another analyst, hopefully sooner rather than later, but you know, that's about my pay grade. And so I, there's a lot of potential here and I really liked that.

Jason: , it seems to me that once again, there has to be a little bit of an adjustment for you because when you go from Essentially, the state police of Texas, you know, with the Department of Public Safety, and now you're going to an agency that you're the sole analyst.

That has to be something where it's a pretty big adjustment for you.

Bel: The, being the only analyst was not the biggest adjustment because when I followed that region director, I was the only analyst at that position. And in that region, so it wasn't too difficult for me to adjust to that.

The biggest adjustment. That I'm still facing even now is I went from a essentially fine tuned machine with DPS, where we had our own division for the [00:30:00] analysts and we had standard operating procedures and policies and expectations and this is how you're going to handle this and this is how you're going to handle that to now coming to a department who May not have had a analyst to the experience and caliber as me.

Right. And so, cause they had not had a intelligence analyst. They had only had a crime analyst. And then before that was like a data analyst or something, and then an administrative analyst. So they had not had what crime analysts and criminal intelligence analysts are doing at DPS. And so that has been the biggest adjustment is essentially teaching my department what I can do based off of my experience That I did when I was with DPS and this is something else that I could do, but I couldn't do at the time for a variety of reasons.

And so that has [00:31:00] been the biggest adjustment that I'm still facing even to this day.

Jason: . So what are the major crimes, major issues that you're dealing with at the police department?

Bel: So different from like state police, right? We're actually dealing with thefts. I don't want to call them basic thefts, but essentially.

You know, thefts from department stores which is not something that the state police was going to worry about, right? If you had a theft at a target, you're not going to call state police to be like, hey, can you assist us with this investigation? And so I've done that to something a little bit more intense, like a homicide.

I've assisted on homicides before, so that wasn't anything new for me. There's a there's a lot more specialization availability here. You know, we have person crimes and property crimes. And so whereas with the state, I was expected to know everything but a little bit. of everything. So I really wasn't specialized in a whole lot, aside from gangs.

[00:32:00] And so coming into the local level, it's, it's very different. Pflugerville is not a huge city. It's pretty, it's kind of small when you compare it to like Austin. And so it's been interesting to learn about these more smaller types of investigations. They're not as, you know, they're not the quote unquote sexy crimes.

But then we have those that, you know, are very, you know, serious, like homicide or crimes against children or, you know, sexual assaults. Where now there's a victim involved. So that's been interesting to be able to switch the types of crimes that I'm involved in to now fit a local level, you know, department.

Jason: . Let's get into the The bigger conversation then about gangs, and let's go back to your statement before where you talked about the prison gangs being [00:33:00] the originator, let's start from there.

And then we can just work into a general conversation.

Bel: Yeah. So the prisons, in Texas were pretty crazy. That's probably the best way that I can describe it. In the prison system back in the eighties you had wars happening between rival gangs and, you know, it's, you think of gangs, You

think of probably the most well known is going to be Mexican Mafia of California and the Aryan Brotherhood of California.

On Texas, we have our own versions of those. We have the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas and the Mexicana me or law enforcement likes to call them the Texas Mexican Mafia. And so, you know, we had a little bit of a California influence to some degree as these prison gangs started making their way.

into Texas. And so you had homicides that were happening in the prison system. Crazy to think that these offenders were killing [00:34:00] each other, but they were. They were having all out wars amongst each other. And a lot of it was along racial lines. So you had the white supremacy gangs fighting the Hispanic gangs when you're talking about the prison system or the prison gangs.

And so, , they set the tone we also came up with gang laws in Texas and a lot of it came because the history of gangs in Texas was the Texas prison gangs. So the, there is a rich. If you want to call it a rich culture or rich history that I could probably talk about the prison gangs for days it was actually my dissertation was gangs.

And one of the aspects that I hit on was a Texas prison gangs. And so. You know, there is a whole lot to learn from California prison gangs because they have an influence in Texas, but the Texas prison gangs are their own beast in and [00:35:00] of themselves. Okay.

Jason: Now, I wrote a paper, let's see, so it's been 20 years probably now, and when I was in, Maryland working for the Washington Baltimore HIDTA and one of the interesting things I found was at least during the time in Maryland, trying to make sure I box this in case it's changed, but one of the things I found was folks were maybe part of a certain prison gang when they were in the correctional system, but then once they went out to, Oh.

Back onto the street back into the real world. They didn't necessarily stay all in the same gang, right? It wasn't like there was this feeder program directly between prison gangs and then the street gangs. And I found that interesting that that folks could be, part of one gang, why they own corrections, but , once they got out, they actually may be [00:36:00] separated and be part of rival gangs once they got out.

Is that something , that you see down there in Texas? So

Bel: yes and no. It's kind of hard to kind of say one way or another simply because in, and I can't speak for the entire prison system of The United States, but in Texas, , the offenders self segregate and they self segregate predominantly through race, right?

So you'll have the whites, the blacks, and the Hispanics. And so, if you have a Hispanic inmate or offender who is a member of the Bloods or the Crips out in the streets, Once he goes to the prison system, the Bloods and the Crips are predominantly black. So he's going to have to align himself with another gang based off of his race.

And he could either be a prison gang, like the Mexican Mafia, who are in administrative segregation, or he's going to try to join a clique.[00:37:00] That is not ad seg, so he can still be in general population, and so it's kind of hard because if, if he were to join a Texas prison gang like the Mexican Mafia or the Texas Syndicate, and he gets out of TDC, he can't go back to the Bloods or the Crips or whatever he was before he did state time because a lot of those prison gangs Are blood in and blood out.

And so, you know, that individual offender is going to have to make a very hard decision on, you know, what's most important to him. And so it, it's yes and no.

Jason: , with the street gangs, , what you're saying now , what are the current trends?

What do you normally tell people when they ask you I'm like, oh, you're into gangs what are, what are you seeing? So

Bel: one of the biggest problems right now are actually hybrid gangs. And it's not a Texas problem. It's happening everywhere. While we still have our, , more historically.

[00:38:00] Accurate, if you want to call it that, of the gang world, like the prison gangs and the nationally recognized gangs, such as the Bloods and the Crips and, you know we do have those, but we are, we are starting to see the younger generation of gang members being hybrid gangs. And essentially what a hybrid, there's this long definition of what hybrid gangs are, but basically you could have a member of one gang and a member of another gang that are may or may not be rivals actually also be a member of a different gang under a different name.

And now they're hybrid gang, because you're now a member of. This one gang, but you're also a member of your home gang. If you want to, that's the best way to kind of explain it. And unfortunately with these hybrid gangs is they're also jumping names. They're it's really based off of like their friend group.

And they're coming up with, you know, their name, they have a [00:39:00] sign or symbol, they have their preferred criminal act, but then something happens within their friend group and. They go and make, they leave and they go and make friends with somebody else. And now they're a whole different gang. And so they're, they're not following the traditional, you know, rules of being a gang member.

Sounds

Jason: like they have a loyalty problem.

Bel: Well, that's just it. Is, is it really about loyalty or is it really all about the Benjamins, right? That's what we like to say. Is it really more about money and it's not really about loyalty. A lot of these gang members that are traditionally rivals. Don't care about the rivalry because they only care about the money.

And so, you know, these hybrid gangs is currently an issue and they're an issue everywhere. It's not unique to Texas, but it

Jason: seems to me that, and I'm guessing they're probably careful, but I would, it seems to me that [00:40:00] these. Hybrid gangs that the bigger gangs, the more traditional gangs would just cut them out, right?

If they're coming on the larger gangs turf or getting impacting their business, they're bigger, the bigger. The bigger fish is going to win. But I'm, I'm guessing with that, there's, there's, there's plenty of Benjamins out there as maybe they are able to navigate the waters to where they're not you know, getting in the way of the bigger

Bel: gangs.

I mean, I, I think there's a a lot that, that comes, that comes into play, right. You know, at least for Texas. Is, is where these gangs are, these hybrid gangs and these traditional gangs are operating? Is, can they operate in a location where the Mexican Mafia are running it? Do the Mexican Mafia even care that they're running it?

I don't know, I can't answer that question. Is it something where they're going to [00:41:00] take one criminal act too far before they get the attention of the more traditional gangs? Maybe there is still so much. Unknowns because every hybrid is different from the next hybrid. So

Jason: are these, so these hybrids typically how big are they?

Bel: Honestly, they vary. They, they could be smaller for three or four. Or they could be much larger. It just depends on each hybrid and what youths are involved in this. And are they friends, family do they have, or have they been around longer or are they new? I think there's a whole lot of factors that come into play as to the size of any

Jason: one.

, for the larger gangs. Are they sticking with the traditional hierarchy or are they going more of a flatter model where they'll have [00:42:00] more managers and less middle management? Just because law enforcement. Trying to cut the head off the dragon so to speak Well,

Bel: that's kind of hard to to to kind of pin down right because if you're talking about more traditional gangs And especially when you're talking about the prison gangs, just because they're in prison doesn't mean that they are not still controlling what's happening out in the free world or out in the street.

And so without pinpointing to any one group, it's kind of hard to really pin that down because. Where are their leadership? Is there, is there leadership in Texas, in the Texas prison system? Is there leadership in the federal prison system? Is there leadership able to make those decisions and those calls from wherever they are at?

Is there leadership? a more fine tuned leadership, like they're the older, you know, the OGs, or are they younger and they're just more disorganized? And that's going to be [00:43:00] a, it's going to be different for each individual

Jason: gang.

And then one of the things I want to talk to you about in terms of gangs is some of the other trends that we see in law enforcement analysis and how that's impacting gangs. So, , you go to any law enforcement analysis conference now, you're going to see the section on social media.

And the impact of social media. On investigations is obviously profound. I'm curious to know how social media has impacted the gangs.

Bel: Social media is one of those things. , right? Mm-hmm. Social media can be extremely useful, I think what. Analysts need to kind of rewire in their brain. Is that just because they're older, right?

The subject is older does not mean that they are not on social media. I've had investigators tell me, well, he is, I'm just going to throw out a [00:44:00] number 58. There's no way that he's on Facebook. And then I find his Facebook account. And so. You never know what they're posting and where they're posting.

I heard a couple of years ago that Facebook is the new MySpace. It's the older people that are using Facebook. And while I took that very personal, because I don't think that I'm that old. I have seen that not actually be the case. I have seen 17 year olds be on Facebook. And so, and that was even up until this morning when I was doing some searches.

And so I, I think for analysts is to not get caught up in this stereotype of who is or is not on social media. , Tik TOK is the new thing right now for the moment anyways. And I have seen plenty of prison gang members. on TikTok. And we're talking about the older, not just the older, but the [00:45:00] ranking members be on TikTok.

And so, you know, don't assume that they're not on social media. It might take a little bit longer to find them, right? We're in this generation of not using their actual names because it's so easy to pick your own profile name. But just because you can't find it, or just because they're a certain age. Or a certain region doesn't mean that they don't have social media.

It just might take a little bit longer to find. And you know, so keep, keep kind of like being aggressive in your searches because you never know, you might find exactly what you're looking

Jason: for.

just like maybe one would expect, is they're using social media, put out a certain message to market, to, to recruit , new members ,

is that pretty much it, or is there something that you wouldn't expect?

So,

Bel: I have actually never seen actual recruitment on social media. [00:46:00] That's not to say that it's not out there. I have not seen it. A lot of it is literally just like flashing who they are. They're posting their photos. They're throwing up their signs. They're displaying their colors. They're, you know, for Outlaw Motorcycle Gang, they're displaying their, their cuts.

And so like it, it, it's not necessarily about recruitment. I mean, it could be to some extent, right? Look at who I'm with, and maybe you'd want to join. But a lot of it is literally what any regular Joe Schmo is doing on social media is posting selfies, right? They're posting pictures to share. And so Yeah, it's it's not necessarily one thing over another

Jason: is gang membership trending up or down it's,

Bel: Without stats being in front of me gangs will be there for a long time.

I don't want to say forever. But I think that's a safe bet to say forever. You're always [00:47:00] going to have gangs around and you're always going to have that generational impact, right? Where you have a grandfather, father, son, that's still going. You have , just because a gang has their leadership or has members in the prison system, doesn't mean that they're not still recruiting within the prison system.

So I can't say it's going up or down. Because unfortunately, we don't have an accurate number of gang membership, because that would require us to be able to document every single gang member across the United States for every single gang, and while we have gang laws that help us for that. We also have limitations because we have gang laws that tell us what is a gang and who can be a gang member by law, right?

And who can be documented. And so without a hard number, it's really hard to say. You don't know the accurate number . Because you have those that don't report.

And so it's kind of, it's kind of hard to give a number or a, a decision. It's, it's more of an opinion, right. And I would hate to give my opinion and then be wrong any which way. Because I think they're always going to be there.

Jason: Let's talk about training a little bit in terms of gang training. What, what are the things that you like to see? Maybe what are some things you see out there that annoy you?

Both sides

Bel: You know, being with TGIA, I actually coordinate training for my region. And so I try to really get a, a grasp of what's happening within my region, right? Like, what are the problems that agencies are seeing that maybe I'm not seeing in my own [00:49:00] agency? And so You know, I, I try to take on the thoughts and opinions of, of others when it comes to training.

I don't think that you can ever be too trained on something because you never know what you don't know until you find out that you didn't know it. Right? And then now you do know. So, you know, training, I think, is, is, is always necessary. Now, one of the things that I have to be very careful with how I say this.

I think when people are training topics that only focus on trying to make something more sexy and not. Acknowledging the fact that maybe we messed up on this. This is how we would have done it better if we could go back. But this is so that you can learn from our mistakes, right?

We all make mistakes. And I think when you're not acknowledging the mistakes were [00:50:00] made, that you're not doing anybody any favors, right? If you did something one way and it didn't work out, well, why didn't it work out or why did it work out? Because maybe the reason why it didn't work out for you is because of X, Y, and Z, or the reason it worked for you is X, Y, and Z, but it wouldn't work out for us because of A, B, and C.

And so I think that's probably my biggest pet peeve when it comes to training is when I see topics. And I know, but I know you messed up on this one aspect and why don't you acknowledge it? Nobody wants to admit that they messed up, but you're not doing anybody, anybody a favor when you don't acknowledge it and be like, we messed up.

This is what we did wrong, but this is how we think that we could do it better.

Jason: Well, I think there's. You know, you have the sensitivity level, right? So there's obviously training that maybe not that ever anybody could sign up for, [00:51:00] but you didn't necessarily may get the intelligence sensitivity.

Right? And then you get to training where it does have such a certification that you really want to make sure that those that are in the room understand the conversation is sensitive but at that level, though, I would hope that they're really getting into the crux of issues, even if they're not fully acknowledging that they made a mistake, there's certainly I would hope behind those closed doors when you really get into deep conversations about this stuff that they're You know, focusing on the issues and focusing on solutions,

Bel: I would hope so as well.

I can't speak for anyone. Presenter. But I would hope that they would take the evaluation, you know, seriously the critique seriously and maybe [00:52:00] have an inner reflection of, you know, what occurred that now they're, they're, they're presenting to other people outside of their agency and really realizing like, okay, what I said could actually impact somebody else.

And somebody else's experience, somebody else's training that could potentially get them in a bind. And so learning from that because you never want to provide training and then provide false information, whether you meant to or not, right? Like, I know I take that very personal is if I find that I said something and I misspoke and now it's taken in a different direction and I want to make sure that I correct it.

Like that's actually not what I meant. This is what I mean. Here is the research that I've done. Here is the investigations that I've assisted on where I got this information from. ,

Jason: the last discussion I want to have with you and it kind of dovetails off of this idea of, training [00:53:00] is, you have your law enforcement analysis.

Conferences. You have your gang investigators conferences. I think a good team up conference would be between those associations. I understand. Obviously, it's going to take some effort and we're talking about years out before it could happen. But I do think members of law enforcement analysis Association and members of Gang investigators really could come together and and have a kick ass conference.

I

Bel: agree. I think that there's so much potential for that. I think there's a lot of logistics to kind of really like hammer out, right? Because you have States that have gang investigators associations and you have some states that don't and

should it be something where it's a week long conference of bringing in, you know, subject matter experts?

on different aspects from within those gang investigators associations, [00:54:00] right? What's happening in California, while maybe similar to what's happening in Texas, it's going to be also different. And so bringing in those two aspects on a more national level versus, you know, when you're talking about international associations you know, we're bringing in people from all across the world.

And the presenters are being very focused on their area. And so bringing in GIAs from across the nation to be able to present what's happening within their area, I think would be amazing to have a, you know, national level gang conference encompassing the associations. And not just for analysts, but, you know, also for sworn police officer.

Cause. You know, ultimately the sworn are going to be the ones making these arrests. So I there's great potential for that there's just a lot of logistical [00:55:00] You know questions that would be let out and so I would love to meet with somebody if they want to make this happen We can make this happen.

Let's get it done

Jason: Nice. All right. Well our last segment to the show is words to the world and this is where you can promote any idea that you wish Bell, what are your words to the world?

Bel: Don't be afraid to network with people, whether they're analysts or whether they're sworn or commissioned, you never know who you're going to meet.

That is now your point of contact down the road, and they're going to be able to. Connect those dots with you

Jason: very good. Why leave every guest with you give me just enough to talk bad about you later oh But I do appreciate you being on this show Bell, thank you so much Congratulations, by the way on becoming a doctor and you

Bel: be safe Thank you, you too.

Mindy: Thank you for making it to the end of another episode of Analysts Talk with Jason Elder. You can show your support by sharing this [00:56:00] and

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Bel: [com](http://www.leapodcasts.com). Till next time, analysts, keep talking.