



Critical response skills can be a true test of resilience. [In this episode of Resilient, James Gore](#), California’s Sonoma County Supervisor, discusses how he stayed resilient following the Tubbs Fire disaster.

*Mike Kearney:*

This one hits home. Remember the fires in Sonoma and Napa in October 2017, that beautiful area, wine country in Northern California? I’ve mentioned it before. My cousin and her family lost their house in Coffey Park in Santa Rosa, so I had a front-row seat watching her and her family recover from losing, essentially, everything.

If you don’t recall the fires, let me jog your memory. They are typically referred to as the Tubbs Fire. It started at Tubbs Lane in the northern part of Calistoga. At the time they were the most destructive wildfire in California history, burned almost 37,000 acres, which is just unbelievable, and incinerated more than 5,600 structures, half of which were homes, and more importantly, it took the lives of more than 20 people.

Today I’m sitting down with James Gore, the Fourth District Sonoma County supervisor—that’s a mouthful. And this is the first time that I have interviewed a politician. After hearing him speak several times, I could tell that he was a passionate public servant, focused on helping the people in Sonoma County recover from the fires.

Some topics I want to talk to him about: first of all, what was his personal story during the night of the fires? How

did they engage the community in the aftermath of the fires? Fighting complacency when the warning signs are present. And this is one of the things that we see both with natural disasters and crises: we know something is likely around the corner, but you essentially defer preparation until it actually hits. What advice James would give to other communities and what's life like in Sonoma County now.

*James Gore:* We were prepared for the slow-moving disasters like our floods, the things we were used to, maybe even earthquakes that weren't catastrophic. We were not prepared for what was truly a natural disaster. And so, going forward, that's what we need to own and that's what our whole recovery and resiliency framework has been about, and our community building around it and pivoting towards that world.

*Mike Kearney:* Welcome to the *Resilient* podcast, where we hear stories from leaders on crisis, risk, and disruption. My name is Mike Kearney, a Deloitte partner based out of San Francisco, and today I am in Santa Rosa, a beautiful town about 60 miles north of San Francisco, and we are conducting today's interview at coLABs, specifically in a room, a start-up called Gajer, a really cool business that is essentially evolving the Like button. And coLABS is this really cool space that brings innovators, entrepreneurs, and creative types together to collaborate, connect, and create.

This is really the perfect place to hear about the resilience of the people of Sonoma County and their resilience after the devastating fires in 2017. I think we're in for a special treat today. James Gore brings a lot of energy, and I'm excited to hear about what he has to say about how he is helping create a more resilient community in Sonoma County.

I've been told I can call you James. Is that cool?

*James Gore:* Absolutely.

*Mike Kearney:* Right on.

*James Gore:* You can call me James, Jimmy, Jaime, whatever you like.

*Mike Kearney:* I could call you Jimmy? I like it. Okay.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Well, hey, I know you have been associated as a politician during one of the biggest natural disasters, a fire in California a couple of years ago up in our beloved Sonoma-Napa wine country. And I want to get into a lot of questions about that, but I want to know, just from a personal perspective, your story. Where were you that night? How did you get involved in it?

*James Gore:* God, it's crazy to think about 18 months ago, how fast it's flown by, and to think about that night is almost like a distant memory to me, but it's not that far away. Shows you how this stuff can just grab you and pull you through a wringer and it almost becomes a twilight zone of one moment. Response, recovery, resilience. Response, recovery, resilience.

But that night, actually I'd been really dead-dog sick for the week before. I had strep throat. My wife had me on quarantine. It was the first time in our relationship that she wasn't sleeping in the same room as me 'cause she's like, "Get the hell away from me."

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah, I don't want to be sick for the next two weeks.

*James Gore:* Yeah. I don't want to be sick. And so my chief of staff, Jenny, was trying to get in touch with us that night 'cause I didn't even have my phone on me. And she woke up my wife on the phone, and my honey came in and was like, "You need to hear this." And Jenny said, "Our whole district is on fire."

And it just gives me the shudders to go through it, but I immediately turned on my phone. And the craziest thing—oh, God, I get the chills right now—is that my friend Tim—there was a voicemail from my friend Tim, that he just—I listened to it and he's just, "James, the entire mountain's on fire. Our house is gone. We're fleeing." Click. And I looked down. I had two or three other notes from friends, same kind of situations, and so from there we immediately jumped into action. I don't think we took a breath for 18 months.

*Mike Kearney:* I don't know if I've shared this with you before. I have shared it on the podcast. So I had a cousin. She was a local dispatcher. Her husband's a sheriff. They lived in Coffey Park. And so what we learned at 5:00 a.m.—I live

in Walnut Creek—the next morning was exactly that story: “House is gone. We fled to my mom’s.”

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Amazing.

*James Gore:* And when people left, they had no idea that they weren’t gonna come back to their house. I had two family members living in Coffey Park who ended up living with me for months following. And that night the one thing that was not unique but that was throughout our whole community is there was an eerie wind. And we’re not used to having what you would consider to be Santa Ana winds from like San Diego, Southern California area, up in ours.

And it was a dry wind coming out of Utah, and it’s called a Diablo Wind. And so 60–70 mile an hour on the fire line, 90-mile-an-hour gusts, 100 even in some parts up on the highlands. This fire moved the equivalent of 16 to 17 miles in three hours-plus. So it was catastrophic. This was not a fire. This was a wind event that just destroyed us.

*Mike Kearney:* Well, and just seeing kind of the disparity of what got impacted—like you’d find one building that would have been burnt down and then the next building next to it was fine. It was amazing.

*James Gore:* Well, in the heat that it drove, too. If you think about it, the fire started by lines, whether those were PG&E lines or personal lines and depending on the fire, but it’s also tough to even call it a fire because there was 120 fires started that night regionally in the North Bay. And those 120 turned into about 20 medium-sized fires, which turned into nine mega fires, and they came together.

And the wind was moving so fast, it wasn’t just like a fire was moving across the hills. It was shooting mortar fire. And I say this very specifically ‘cause that’s what the fire marshal from Santa Rosa told me, is that when he was driving, after he went to the fire line and turned around and turned on his speaker and was yelling at people, “Everybody evacuate,” sirens full blast, he said there was fires all in front of him, as much as five, ten different football fields. He’d go up and be like, “Oh, there’s another fire over here.” It felt like a fog of war for at least the first three to four days.

*Mike Kearney:* So we're gonna get into the fire a lot more, but I want to learn a bit about you. And one of the reasons is I think the context of the leader, their upbringing, who they are, influences a lot of the decisions that they make in a time of crisis. So let's go to who is James and let's just start with—I know you grew up in this area, but maybe if you could talk about your early years.

*James Gore:* You know, I'm from here. I grew up in the mountains. I grew up, as a kid, not on the ocean but rather running through those hills and pushing down dead trees and playing in creeks, all up and down 'em. Three of my childhood homes burnt in this fire.

*Mike Kearney:* Wow.

*James Gore:* And it's been shocking to kind of embody such this place and, in one degree, be native from it. And then, realistically, I was a kid who grew up, didn't really look around me, but always had this sense that I wanted to be a part of something important. My parents always instilled in me and believed in me that "you're gonna be a part of changing the world for the better." And, for whatever reason, I believed it, and so I've never let go of that and it led me to a lot of different paths in between growing up and then now being an elected official here.

*Mike Kearney:* You went into the Peace Corps after college.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* What drove you to that? And what's funny is I actually sat down at University of Texas. I was down there a couple weeks ago with some girl that was doing a two-year commitment. And it was amazing to hear why she was going into it at this point in time. What was your reason?

*James Gore:* I have to start by saying my dad was a Peace Corps volunteer in like the '60s. And you would never think that. My dad was a salt-of-the-earth, grouchy farmer. But here was this guy who grew wine grapes in Sonoma County, studied agriculture, and spoke four languages and was a beekeeper. So he's kind of a wild card, right?

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* And my dad was a difficult man and, when you're young, not a great father, but he was like this inspiring kind of rugged outdoorsman and other things. And so I don't know why. There was this allure to it. There was this allure to adventure. I never thought at that time that I would ultimately follow in those footsteps in my own way, but I did, and part of it was because I, having gone through college and getting a degree and doing very well and graduating with honors, I still felt like it was aseptic. It wasn't filled with purpose. I wasn't connecting to whatever was important around me.

And that led me to public service, which is Peace Corps, which is serving in the Obama administration as a presidential appointment, going to the shadows of our country and leading persistent poverty efforts, which led me to come back home and ultimately run for office.

*Mike Kearney:* So go back to when you were thinking about graduating college and what you were gonna do, because I think this is actually a challenge that a lot of kids coming out of college now have, and we bring a lot of those folks into Deloitte. Was it a moment in time where you said, "I actually need to do something that is more purpose driven"? What drew you to that? 'Cause that's not something oftentimes a senior in college contemplates.

*James Gore:* And it wasn't even a thought process. It was more of an addiction.

*Mike Kearney:* Interesting.

*James Gore:* It was absolute need. And I think about this a lot. What is it that drives me? What is it that drives others? I find it to be far more important than what somebody's doing. I don't care if you're a garbage man, an international development officer, a lobbyist, a congressional staffer, an elected official, why is it that makes you connect with what you do? That's what's important to me.

And I just knew what I wasn't connecting with. And I tell that to young people all the time. If you don't know what you want to do, start with a list of what you don't want to do. It's a great way.

*Mike Kearney:* Absolutely.

*James Gore:* 'Cause you know that.

*Mike Kearney:* And a lot of times those things you don't want to do are the natural path.

*James Gore:* Well, it's the well-beaten path. As you say, the natural path is the one that you look and it says, "Oh, well, once you graduate, you know, you've gotten a degree in agriculture business, which is business with wine making and viticulture. I'm gonna go into the family world and grow grapes or make wine, or run a wine business and do this. And I'm studying leadership." But for some reason there wasn't a connection between the two for me. It just was not connecting. It didn't set the hook.

So, for me, it led off a search down the obscure path that, ultimately, I had to trust in the fact that I just had to jump in. And the Peace Corps was one of those experiences because I had traveled. I already spoke three languages by the time I joined the Peace Corps. I grew up speaking Spanish. I'd studied in Italy. I'd switched my Spanish over to Italian. I loved immersing myself. I mean, that wasn't easy. That's full immersion language, right?

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* And when I went into the Peace Corps, it was like, okay, well, now you gotta build something. You want to be a part of changing something, and you can't just stay for the exciting time when it's like a week visiting Italy or even Slovenia or somewhere crazy. You've gotta stay there. And when you stay there, you figure out the frustrations. You figure out why a place didn't develop. You figure out what are the barriers between communities, the social barriers, to whether it's economic development or community resilience, and you really see 'em in your face.

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah, absolutely. I want to go back to one thing and then move on, but what you said I think struck a chord with me, which is—and this is maybe advice to kids coming out of college—is don't necessarily worry about the job. Figure out the thing that you're connected to in an emotional way and don't let the job define you. I think that's also kind of what you're saying, is, "Yes, I'm a supervisor now, but that's not who I really am. Who I really am is somebody that's connected to a deeper purpose."

*James Gore:* People think about jobs as identity. All I look at a job is it's a platform to do something that you want to do. Right?

*Mike Kearney:* To do something, yeah.

*James Gore:* So even recently I got elected by my colleagues around the state to be the super-supervisor. So I'm the head of, an officer for 58 counties and all these supervisors. I don't care. If that's on my resume, whatever, that's not on my gravestone. Who the hell cares that I was the president of the California State Association of Counties?

What it allows me do is go out and slay it with 58 counties around the state, and go in and work with my colleagues and learn about things like in the Central Valley, where Leticia Perez is battling institutional racism as the first Latina supervisor, where Doug Verboon, a white family for six generations in the Tulare Basin, is having their water extracted from the aquifers and shipped into cities, out of their areas. I mean, these are amazing things that are going on in our country, and that's the stuff that gets me so fired up.

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah. It gives you the platform so you can make a difference.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Can you talk about what you did at the Department of Agriculture? StrikeForce is that program I think you created.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Maybe just talk a bit about that.

*James Gore:* Well, the funny thing about the Department of Agriculture, to start with, is that a lot of it is not agriculture. There's this big area of Agriculture called Rural Development, and it's the most money in the Department of Ag, and it's hundreds of billions of dollars in leveraged funds, grants, and loans coming together that support rural communities. It's, in fact, the vestiges of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which did electrification, basically telephone lines, and now does broadband, community facilities, water pipes,



conservation, everything.

So I went in and I worked within the secretary's office, and this one guy was my boss. He was the assistant secretary, Pearlie S. Reed, big civil rights leader, true, tough dude in this world. Had seen it all. Like for him segregation was a reality that he experienced, not something like I read about in a book. He loved the fact that I was in the Peace Corps, I spoke other languages, and I was kind of like a little just tweak different from a Hill staffer who came over to the work for the administration.

But I was inspired to work for that president. I was a part of the Yes We Can, and I wasn't on the campaign. I wasn't overly political. I am just an optimistic person in this world, and that was a campaign that was driven on optimism, not fear. Right?

*Mike Kearney:* Yep.

*James Gore:* So I wanted to get in. It took me about a year and a half to get an appointment. I mean, that's a whole nother story in itself. Jeez. But when I came in, the Obama administration had this focus on they wanted to invest in persistent poverty areas, places that had been left behind. And it was fascinating for me to realize that I'd gone all the way to Bolivia to try and change the world and there were so many shadows in my own damn country.

And so I did work, basically, to steer our resources, whether it was rural development, farm service agency, or conservation work, and steer it towards the Mississippi Delta region, Appalachia, US-Mexico border in an area called the colonias and tribal reservations around the country. And in these areas, you found what persistent poverty truly was: a lack of hope, which drove a lack of economic development, unhealthy—huge issues all across *[crosstalk]*.

*Mike Kearney:* Opioid issues and—yeah, oh, my God. Yeah.

*James Gore:* Opioid, teen pregnancy, gang, everything that you could have.

*Mike Kearney:* I was blown away when I did some research on you that the poverty rate in these rural areas. I don't think I had an appreciation for the extent that it really is.

*James Gore:* No.

*Mike Kearney:* So you came back to—let's pivot now—you came back to Northern California.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* What brought you back to Northern California? Did you actually at that time want to become a politician, or was it the draw of the beautiful state we live in?

*James Gore:* No, I knew I was gonna get into public service, and I've battled with this idea of politics because politics is a four-letter word for many people in this world and they define politicians based on a specific stereotype. And I fight every day to basically shirk that stereotype, and that's why it was such an inspiring thing to be of service to my community during a disaster.

I knew that it was a way for me to be a leader. I knew I'd have to step into an area that I'd be accused of having bad intentions. But I just choose to not be an idealist or a realistic, but get stuff done. And so instead of screaming at the brick wall from the outside, identify the mortar, check it out, work on it, figure out how to break down, repair, but learn the system.

*Mike Kearney:* That does feel like your MO. I've seen you speak a couple times. You feel, I know it's an overused word, but authentic, like let's figure out what the issues are and get it done.

*James Gore:* Yeah. And it's very tough to live in a world that talks about partisanship and things so much. I tell people my true politic party is the GSD party: the get stuff done party. You know? Every day in every way.

*Mike Kearney:* We should start that party. That's a good party.

*James Gore:* Hey, it's on. I was a presidential appointee in the Obama administration. I went around this country and was accused of being a whack job liberal by every rural area I went into. The reality is I grew up a farm boy and I'm a pretty practical guy and I just like to find a solution. On

the other side, I come back and I run for office. All five supervisors here, including me, are Democrats. I ended up being attacked as being a conservative 'cause I had support from the Farm Bureau, from the business community and the others. And I'm just like, "Ugh, this dualism is killing me."

*Mike Kearney:* How do you overcome that, though? Is it—?

*James Gore:* Sweat equity.

*Mike Kearney:* Sweat, yeah. Prove yourself.

*James Gore:* Well, to break down stereotypes, you can't—those are deeply held beliefs, so you can't do it through an interview, through a talk or whatever, because people get religious about this stuff. So, for me, it's just I keep slaying it every day, so if you don't agree with me, at least you respect my work ethic and what I'm doing.

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah. Well, I was listening to a podcast that had nothing to do with politics, religion, anything. It was actually about the diet industry right now. And this guy was talking about the fact that if you actually criticize that diet, you're actually criticizing the person, and I think the same is true with politics. It's like if you criticize Republicans or Democrats, you're criticizing me as a person. And that's why it's so hard to get over it.

*James Gore:* Well, and so much of the stuff is—someone gave me a sticker the other day that said, "Try to be informed, not just opinionated."

*Mike Kearney:* I like that. Absolutely.

*James Gore:* And so that's a goal for me, is to always make sure that what I'm talking about is something that I believe, and if I don't know it well enough to have an opinion on it, then I should just be confident enough to say, "I don't know. I'm still looking into that."

*Mike Kearney:* That's a powerful statement.

*James Gore:* God forbid, instead of just blah-blah-blah.

*Mike Kearney:* Or every time you do make it up, you get caught.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* So that's what I've found.

*James Gore:* Well, that's when we talk about, you know, this word that you use, "authenticity," is that I love it when people tell me that I come across as authentic. I'm like, oh, that makes me want to put my foot on the gas on that. And then I swing a little too loose and some of my staff and my friends and others are like, "Whoa, calm it down."

*Mike Kearney:* We heard that before the interview. Let's go back to the fire. Can you talk about—we know the impact of the fire—you more than I. But I live in this area, so I've seen it firsthand. I've seen many other natural disasters. It's funny. I was thinking about your commentary on your dad. Mine was a San Francisco cop for 35 years, and so he had the Loma Prieta earthquake, and so he sounds like the same type of guy.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* In any event, can you talk about what was the impact on the community? And you could take that any way you want, whether there's stats or if there's a story that stands out. Any way. But just to make this real for the listeners.

*James Gore:* Well, I'll start at a high level and then you can tell me where you want to dig on which of 'em. The stats are 5,300 homes, 7,000 structures burnt down in just the Tubbs—well, the Tubbs and the Nuns fire, Sonoma County alone. You're talking about, region wide, 44 deaths, 28 in our area. God. I just have to go back a minute. I mean, it's like 110,000 acres in that fire. Most catastrophic and most destructive wildfire in California's history, now has been tripled by the Butte-Paradise fire; the Camp Fire is what it's called.

You gotta realize that during those days it felt like a fog of war. Everyone was rolling around. I even came across this guy who got in a car accident, ran into this lady in the middle of an intersection. I jumped out of my truck and tried to help him get to the side, and he had bullets all over the floorboard of his car. He was like in straight-up survivalist mode. I looked down at him through his window and I was like, "Hey, bro, why you got those bullets? You're not gonna shoot me, are you?" He looks

up at me and he's just shaking, and he says, "No, no, no. I'm just taking care of myself."

*Mike Kearney:* Wow. That was the mentality.

*James Gore:* Like what the hell is going on here?

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah.

*James Gore:* Yeah, it was like this weird thing. The smoke was omnipresent. Everybody's wearing masks. People are driving all over the place. Half of the area is shut down. It's like scurrying, scurrying around. Pure chaos, right? And so then you go and you say, okay, that was the moment of the event, and that's the impact of what was happening and how it was just burning and scarring our community. But in a crazy way, it showed us the most resilience that I've ever seen in my life, because what have we seen? Number one, is that lives were saved each and every day, not just by first responders but by neighbors. I mean, the stories are just crazy.

*Mike Kearney:* Do you have a story? Is there something that just stands out? Any one?

*James Gore:* Yeah. Well, Phyllis. Right?

*Mike Kearney:* Yep.

*James Gore:* Eighty-two years old. Her husband of 49 years had passed away six weeks before the fire. She's sitting at the base of the mountain. Somebody comes, one of her neighbors, and knocks on her door, wakes her up. And this beautiful, powerful, red-haired, fiery, 83-year-old woman goes back inside, then runs out and says—as he's going away—yells at him and asks, has the wherewithal to ask him to open her garage. Why? Power was out. I hate to say this, but do you know how many people passed away who could not open their garages? Elderly folks who because the power was out. So she has the wherewithal to ask for that.

He comes over. She's telling me this story a month later. He opens her garage and she sits there with her car running and thinks about—she tells me she had the thought, "Should I just stay here and go see my husband?"

*Mike Kearney:* Oh.

*James Gore:* Is it my time?

*Mike Kearney:* Is it my time, yeah.

*James Gore:* And, ultimately, not only does she put it in drive and leave, but she puts it in hyper-drive and she's one of our most active block captains. Eighty-three years old.

*Mike Kearney:* It's almost, I hate to say this 'cause obviously in tragedy you never want to see that, but it's given her, essentially, purpose in life now.

*James Gore:* I mean this woman comes in, and the block captain network that we created—

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah, can you talk about—I know what the block captain network is, but can you share what that is?

*James Gore:* It's been by far the most inspiring thing I've been a part of for this whole experience. The days and the weeks into the disaster went from chaos to, at best, cacophony. So then all of a sudden you were having these big community town halls where I and others were standing up and we were figuring it out on the fly, and there was hundreds of people, or 200 people, or 1,000 people in a school gymnasium with FEMA and CalOps of emergency services and firefighters and everybody.

*Mike Kearney:* What were they looking at?

*James Gore:* Maps.

*Mike Kearney:* Like the community probably was wanting answers, right?

*James Gore:* They wanted answers. They wanted leadership. They wanted something. They wanted answers. And so some of those came, but there was a lot of "I don't know yet," and there was a lot of "we'll have to wait and see." And those became, truly, only good enough to share broad information and people left frustrated and irate and almost to the point where it was like mob rules.

So I went back and I thought about it a little bit, and I pulled kinda my staff members, Jenny, Jenn, around me, and Jenny specifically, my chief of staff, and I just said, "We need to go back to community organizing." We

walked every one of these neighborhoods when we ran for office. We knocked on 50,000 doors. Like I know every one of these.

So we went and printed out the precinct maps. We started to host meetings. I hosted two different organizing meetings where I sat up and, with a marker, drew areas and broke people into subsections, gave them a list of five things to do: to keep each other's information down, write down who their common insurance was, what their new cell phone was, and, basically, then self-elect a block captain, and that I would meet with those block captains every week.

*Mike Kearney:* How many sections ultimately were drawn up?

*James Gore:* We still meet with anywhere from, let's say, 18 to 20 different block captains every week that represent, I would say, about 3,000 homes that burnt down in neighborhoods. And you have this amazing stuff. Like Mike Holder has went and inventoried everybody and was able to get a bulk builder to come back into Mark West Estates, and one builder is working with 80 people to rebuild their homes.

On the other side, you have Brad Sherwood and some of their friends, who actually worked with us and advocated, and we put sewer back into a neighborhood so that they can rebuild with accessory dwelling units, build more hardened, do other things. You have across the way Coffey Strong, which we helped organize and create, and then they created their own entity and still work with us. But they were like, "We'll take what you're doing here, your organizing, and we'll organize our own."

I mean, the stories are just absolutely inspiring. We've changed laws. We've raised millions of dollars for rebuild efforts in their areas, like common walls, vegetation removal, dead tree removal. And more than anything, it's been the perfect example of imperfect, relentless progress, which is the only thing you have in this world.

*Mike Kearney:* What would you have done differently? Would it have been essentially putting these communities or these captains, block captains, together earlier? How would you have gotten out of that everybody like frustrated when they came together?

*James Gore:* I think it needed to happen.

*Mike Kearney:* You do? So that's part of the normal process.

*James Gore:* I hate to say it, but there's no—once again, as I mentioned, there's nothing perfect but imperfect, relentless progress, and I say that a lot. And people will forgive you imperfection when you're going through that moment if you let them know, "Hey, I'm just working. We're working our tails off to try and do the best we can. We don't have all the answers." What they don't want is you to be fake.

*Mike Kearney:* Right. I would also imagine, with these block captains, you essentially—every one of those examples you gave were different, and it was specifically based, I'm guessing, on their needs in their area. And you empowered them to a certain degree to use their efforts to help solve the problem.

*James Gore:* And when you say "empower," it's funny because sometimes we get lost in semantics. But what I've really in my head switched from is that I'm not—am I empowering them? Well, I think what I'm doing is uncapping them, 'cause they're ready to go.

*Mike Kearney:* That's a good way of seeing it, yeah.

*James Gore:* They're ready to go. They just needed a base-level organizational structure. They needed a foundation, some pipe, some plumbing, some electrical and other things, and now they're building these amazing initiatives. On the one-year anniversary of the fire, they're hosting block parties in their neighborhoods, looking up into the hills with bands playing and kegs and potlucks. Instead of feeling depressed, on the one-year anniversary they're in their neighborhood, saying, "Come on."

*Mike Kearney:* I love that. There are so many ways that we could go with that, but just going back to that point about you kind of untapping them, in many respects what we've seen in natural disasters is people from the community, outside the community just want to help. And what you probably did was directed their effort so that they could be most productive.

*James Gore:* Instead of control steer, I always try and think through. And at the beginning, you were talking about leadership,



and it was a great example throughout this process, not just the block captains, not just the communication and town halls, but also this other aspect, which was the updates that we were doing during the fire created a Facebook fire. All of a sudden, we had 40,000 100,000 200,000 views on our videos, and I was shocked, but not super-shocked, because we were leading through followership. We were doing what we would want to see, you know?

*Mike Kearney:* Right. Yeah.

*James Gore:* So instead of me giving me a speech, "Hey, everybody. Here's James Gore," I would go every morning and meet with the battalion chief for Cal Fire and then his other one for the other fire, and I would interview 'em with the map, and he would go through. And all of a sudden, these Facebook posts had 1,000 shares. And I had stories coming back to us like where my friends, the Hafners, said that they were trapped in Alexander Valley. They didn't have anything other than a telephone. Their daughter was watching our Facebook videos of where the fire was from her study abroad program in Spain and calling them on the telephone and dictating it to 'em.

And so people were writing like, "The news isn't giving us any information. We don't know where the fire is, what's happening, what's going on. Keep doing this." And then people started to write, "What about Lake County? What about Geyser Peak?" And so the next morning or the next afternoon, I would go ask them.

And the firefighters and the emergency managers who didn't have the chain of command to be able to speak, I would just have 'em speak to me and then I would try and do it verbatim and point it at a map. So as much as people look at me as being a great leader in that moment, I was trying to be a great deliverer for what people needed. As opposed to, in my mind, do I need to give a speech? What do people need?

*Mike Kearney:* Right. Well, and instead of you sitting up there pontificating, you connected. I mean that's essentially what you did. I love the use of social media. It's a great example.

*James Gore:* Well, in a world of fake news, it was fascinating to realize that social media can be used as real news—

*Mike Kearney:* Something productive, yeah.

*James Gore:* —in an incident time like that, and that it can create a feedback loop. If I was just posting those videos and I didn't know that the first day it was 1,000, the second day it was 5,000, the third day it was 10,000 views and 100 shares, 200, 500, I might have not kept doing it, right, 'cause I don't know if people are really receiving it. So there are some strange case studies, I would almost say, that have come out of this that really need to be refined, replicated, and shared.

*Mike Kearney:* I'm dying to know what brought you to, "Hey, I'm gonna jump on, I'm gonna interview the battalion chief, I'm gonna throw it up on Facebook, any other social media? Was it kind of in the moment or is this something actually you gave some thought to if something like this ever happened?"

*James Gore:* It wasn't in the moment. I'd like to say it was, but as much as we're talking about a fire, we're also talking about, since I started running for office, we have gone from historical drought, the driest year on record in the history of Sonoma County, to flooding, historical flooding, with the wettest year in the history of Sonoma County since 1850.

*Mike Kearney:* Was that the two, that's two or, is that this year or two years ago?

*James Gore:* That was two years ago.

*Mike Kearney:* Two years. I remember that was [*crosstalk*].

*James Gore:* Then we went to catastrophic wildfire, most destructive wildfire in California history, and now we've had another more historical drought than we had two years ago.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* One of the things that I've realized during those moments—in a strange way sometimes you think that the world sets you up in the way that it needs to—is I was going around with my team doing those kinds of updates during floods and other things, and all of a sudden you'd get like 500 Facebook friend requests when you were doing flood updates. You're like, "Oh, people want this."

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* And then there was a different fire in between those two. There was the Sulphur Fire, and we were worried about the entire community of Cloverdale and Geyserville. And I got another 600 Facebook friend requests during that time and 1,000 followers. I'm like, "Jesus." And then came the mega fire, and I just—it just was natural.

*Mike Kearney:* It's almost a platform you built taught you what you would do in a situation like that.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* James, one of the things we see oftentimes during a natural disaster is people flooding in to help out, volunteers.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* It's oftentimes hard to use 'em. So the couple questions that I have is how did you best leverage them, or if you've got any lessons learned, insights. And then we also see kind of a precipitous drop-off. It's like when it's out of the news cycle, people aren't paying as much attention, and that's really when you need some of those volunteers. Maybe if you could just talk about if that was an issue or not or what you saw.

*James Gore:* Well, it absolutely was. I mean, donations, number one. We gotta realize that there was a lot of people who even used money to buy stuff to try and bring in, and we had to plead with people to, if you're gonna give, which we really need, either put money into a fund that we can use strategically, like the Redwood Credit Union Resilience Fund, the Tipping Point Fund, and all these others. I mean, there was about \$60 million to \$80 million that came in philanthropic-wise for our catastrophe.

But at the same time, it was "I want to help. I want to help. I want to help." And sometimes the best way you can help is to get out of the way. I hate to say it, but that was what I had to learn for me too. So this is really a part of being a resilient county and a resilient community from the front end. If you haven't practiced this stuff, if you haven't planned for it, if you don't know who's running the shelters, if you haven't talked about which

community-based organizations, which NGOs are gonna be running donations or other things like that, then you have no way to manage that.

And so that's what I feel like we were not prepared for. We were prepared for the slow-moving disasters like our floods, the things we were used to, maybe even earthquakes that weren't catastrophic. We were not prepared for what was truly a natural disaster. And so, going forward, that's what we need to own and that's what our whole recovery and resiliency framework has been about and our community building around it, and pivoting towards that world.

*Mike Kearney:* Hey, I got a question, though. You've gotten religion because you went through the fire. What do you tell a community where there's all the warning signs? And, actually, you know what, I was gonna ask you this later. I'm gonna use this quote that you had: "The complacency that exists in our community prior to this cannot continue," which that is not an aberration. I mean, that's what most communities probably feel, even though, like I always talk about the fact that I went through the Loma Prieta earthquake. I'm not sure if I'm any better prepared now than we were back then. How do you get communities to focus on this before it happens?

*James Gore:* Well, shock value is one thing, right?

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah.

*James Gore:* I feel like even when I'm talking to you here today, I've been on a road show a little bit for the last 18 months about trying to share this as much as possible, to be a harbinger of not fear about the future, but about the need for resilience. But the easiest way I could say that, I think, is you want to be Paul Revere, not Chicken Little.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* So I have a platform. I have the ability, whether it's through my county network, whether it's being the chair of the National Association of Counties Resiliency, the California State Association of Counties Resiliency, going to all these conferences, Climate Adaptation—even later today, keying up this climate change symposium we're doing. It's like, use it. Own your link in the chain. That's all you can do.

So the way I do it with people is I say, I'll get up in front of a crowd, or just in front of one person, and I'll say, "We did not learn from San Diego, Santa Barbara, and Lake County, and we got smoked. You better learn from us because there's nothing more important than this, and all of the trends are pointing towards more of it. Is that a time to be fearful? No. But I am gonna grab everyone in this room by the shoulders and I'm gonna shake the ... out of you, and I want you to wake up, because you have to realize this will usurp your budget. It will usurp your staff. Every priority will be thrown under the table and be regurgitated. It will take your general fund, your budgets, and spin 'em around outside. But it will create huge opportunities for you to change things like you never could before also."

*Mike Kearney:* Touch on that 'cause I think that's a really important point. I think what you're saying is, if you actually take this seriously, it's not just about being prepared so that you could respond when the crisis hits or the disaster hits. Actually, it's about making a community, a more resilient community, a community where people actually want to come and live and work and all of that.

*James Gore:* Being somebody who loves change, to the point that I had to, I gotta slow it down to make sure some people are comfortable and I can get enough votes to do it, there's no opportunity like the permission and urgency that comes out of chaos.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* And so some people see chaos as—and dysfunction or a lack of direction—as a fearful thing, and I see it as opportunity. I've always seen that in jobs. Like, hey, somebody says, "You're coming into this job, but it's been pretty tough here." Some people see that as fearful. Some people as see it as like, "Great. What an opportunity for change." That old quote by Rahm Emanuel: "Never waste a crisis," right. So we have been able to push forward an entire new strategic operational action plan for our entire community and the region.

*Mike Kearney:* Could you have done that before, do you think?

*James Gore:* No. Everyone was too damn busy to do damn good work, including me. We were in many ways—I could spend my

whole life as an elected official focusing on potholes, permits, and garbage cans, because I currently—even though I was at the national level, I worked internationally, I chose to come back to my community and be an example of community first. And we gotta deliver every day, which means that you get confused by the cacophony of the present. And so, for me, it's been absolutely inspiring and I ain't gonna give it up [crosstalk].

*Mike Kearney:* So what are some of those big changes that you were referencing?

*James Gore:* Well, in one degree, it's I could go into tactical things. The fact that we have going up one of the most advanced, not just fire, but weather camera systems that you can find anywhere. We've accelerated our radar, our X band radio, which forecasts basically atmospheric rivers and categorizes 'em further than anybody else in the nation on where we're doing. Our investments into emergency services and alert and warning. Alert and warning is something that we were accused of basically failing our community on, using it as a turning point to be the best in class anywhere. Putting the money towards reorganizing our fire services. I mean, we have done in 18 months more than it would have taken us a decade to do all of these things on preparedness, mitigation, management, adaptation.

On the other side, this opportunity to really get back into the culture of national preparedness, and not use it as a fearmongering, but remind people that no matter how good the system is, the government, the nonprofit is not gonna save you. If you live in an area that has risk, and I dare you to find an area that does not have risk—

*Mike Kearney:* Of some sort.

*James Gore:* —you gotta at least think about it. And so, as much as I talk about the government and what I'm doing and other things, I also gotta go home and make sure I have a go bag. When the floods came up three weeks ago, I got an evacuation order for my house. I didn't think my house was gonna flood, and it didn't, but you think I'm not gonna heed that warning? I'm not gonna use it as an opportunity to get—my wife was out on travel—I'm not gonna use it as an opportunity to, as a dad, go get our

papers, get my kids loaded up, and go figure out what we're doing?

*Mike Kearney:* Absolutely.

*James Gore:* And teach them during the process of what we were doing, we're leaving 'cause of that water.

*Mike Kearney:* And why, yeah. What about on a community level? So you've talked about a lot of things that you've done to respond, to be better prepared for the next fire or whatever it may be. You also talked earlier about the community coming together, the one-year anniversary. Has there been things that you've done at a community level as well, whether it's housing or jobs or other things that you've done to recover, that you'd like to profile?

*James Gore:* Yeah, and the first thing—I'm glad you mentioned this—is because what we did is we created the block captain network. And then it promulgated. It spread into the other regions: my two colleagues, who represent areas that were burnt out as well. And so it's great to see these things, the good kind of infection. Right?

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* But I used it as an opportunity to say, okay, we need to not just have a block captain network for the area that burnt, but we need to create a resilience network. And so we now have, on the other side of the block captains, we have 15 different communities that we have been organizing around COPE and CERT, Citizens Organized to Prepare for Emergencies, Citizen Emergency Response Teams.

And so we have gone out, even without funding, just to get Fitch Mountain, Mill Creek, and northeast Geyserville, which are the three that are just leading the charge. They're testing air horns. They're cataloging inventory of who has elderly parents, who has water sources. They're doing all this stuff. And then we have 15 more that are coming up in different areas of it.

So that's where you reach into resilience. And the only way you can do that is by empowering people to have power, or to uncap them, because if I try and do it all as a county supervisor or somebody as any elected official or

leader, that is not a movement. I cannot be a movement. It has to be a group.

*Mike Kearney:* Right. You can't tell somebody to do something that they otherwise don't want to do.

*James Gore:* So now these groups, in a beautiful way, are pressuring me and my staff to do more.

*Mike Kearney:* How's that?

*James Gore:* "We want more. We want more funding. We want more education." God, what a great problem to have.

*Mike Kearney:* You know what's interesting? I'm sure there's probably an unintended benefit associated with all of this around just creating greater community, a sense of community across areas that you serve. Have you seen that? These are probably people that haven't talked to each other, honestly.

*James Gore:* Well, the first thing is is that the people who are moving back into their neighborhoods didn't know their neighbors before because, in many ways, we all know we live in a society where a lot of people in bedroom communities go back into their bedrooms and check their iPhones and watch TV instead of get to know each other. And they're at the point where they are straight up like telling us, "I didn't know my neighbors. We're gonna be having Christmas dinner together for the next 30 years."

On the other side, the resilience folks are like, "I never knew my neighbors, but now I feel like I know Bob, I know his elderly mother lives out there, and I got their back." And it's not about resilience. It's about community, which is resilience.

*Mike Kearney:* Right. And also attracting people back that potentially could have left. Right?

*James Gore:* Oh, yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Or people that you're always looking to grow the community and bring new people in. That's what you want.

*James Gore:* Well, and as much as we're talking about the passion and the inspiration and all the good examples, we can't leave



out those who we've lost during this process. First and foremost, these harrowing stories of those who lost their lives or the people who are still in hospitals with 65 percent of their bodies burnt that aren't talked about anymore.

We also can't forget to talk about the fact that of the 5,300 homes that were burnt down in Sonoma County, 40 percent of those were occupied by long-term renters, and only 29 percent of renters have rental insurance, which means that the renters are screwed and they just disappear. And they, as FEMA housing folks have talked to us about and we've talked to the renters, they kind of are a funny bunch that just kind of says, "Ah, well, I'm screwed."

Then you got this whole other group that 60-plus percent of the people who were homeowners, who had homeowner's insurance, are underinsured by an average value of \$200,000. Some insurance companies have passed full court policies to say, "We'll give you 100 percent of your building. We'll give you 100 percent of your contents without a contents list. And we'll make your ALE, your alternative living expenses, a lump sum instead of holding you to a two-year rebuild timeline." Other insurance companies don't make policies, and it comes down to every person rat-ass negotiating with an adjuster.

And this isn't good or evil. This is about clarity and it's about accountability and it's about trying to get it done, so we are pushing so many reform efforts—state, national, local—and the reality is that this needs to be a priority not just for me but for everyone.

*Mike Kearney:* Right. Well, it's also probably a good reminder to everybody out there to go look at your home policy. I'm sure you've heard a lot of stories like that, like are you really covered, 'cause that's one of those things where you sign up for it, you file it, and you don't think of it until you need it.

*James Gore:* I know a guy in Coffey Park who came up to me, Roger, and he said, "James, four months ago I got a note in the mail from my insurance company that asked if I wanted to pay an extra \$29 a year for an inflator on my homeowner's insurance to allow for cost of living adjustment." He said, "The fact that I checked that and

marked yes, that \$29.99 got me \$230,000 of extra money."

*Mike Kearney:* It's amazing. And that's one of those things you just don't even really think about.

*James Gore:* No.

*Mike Kearney:* It's kind of luck of the dice. Do I check it or not?

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* Or do I see it?

*James Gore:* Well, and there are some people who want to jump to the other side and say, "Well, we need to over-regulate. We need to pass all these laws," and you're like, "Man, if you pass all those laws like in that way, those companies will leave." 'Cause we have another issue, which is insurance companies saying, "It's too high risk for us to insure people in those areas in the future." So then what do you do? Do you allow people to live into a high hazard zone area and create a public insurance pool? We've seen those in other states and in other areas and I haven't seen 'em run very good.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* So there's these funny things.

*Mike Kearney:* It's like this balance.

*James Gore:* Once again it comes back to, on that side, there's many people who would say you need insurance reform, and I come back and say, yeah, but what you need is transparency and accountability.

*Mike Kearney:* Absolutely.

*James Gore:* You need to make sure that when somebody signs something, it's about if it says "full coverage" it really means full coverage. You don't need to say what full coverage has to be to put insurance companies out of business. You need to make sure people know how much it is, what they're paying, and what they would get in return. You can't have every policy have a different definition based on what the public adjuster perceives it to be from five different insurance companies.

*Mike Kearney:* Agreed. What about the impact of the fires on business, especially small business, and how have they come back? What's your thoughts on that?

*James Gore:* Ooh.

*Mike Kearney:* It's like we could do a whole nother episode.

*James Gore:* Well, no cause without effect, right? So the first thing to realize is that some government programs work and some just don't.

*Mike Kearney:* Don't. Yeah.

*James Gore:* I could go into this for years, but on our homeowner side and some of our business side, they call the Small Business Loan Program the fictitious loan program because, on the homeowners' side, if only 9 percent of people qualify at the end of the day, what have you really achieved?

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* Oh, it's nice that 9 percent of people qualify, but, you know, anyways. Let me stop that and go back to your actual—

*Mike Kearney:* Oh, let me ask the question—

*James Gore:* Businesses lost it. There were businesses that have no way to recuperate those losses. Now, I'm not talking about the ones that were burnt down. I'm also talking about the fact that it was the heavy part of tourism season. People took hits of \$100,000 to \$500,000 more, and they just gotta eat it and go on. And no one's screaming and trying to help them out.

On the other side, you have businesses that have been created out of nowhere. And it's crazy to think about the dearth of resources for one area creates a surplus for others. Our debris removal process, which was more debris removed than the entire 1906 earthquake, was \$1.1 billion debris removal process. We fought to get good wages and local priority for all of our companies to remove that debris. So there's contractors, there's truck drivers, there's backhoe folks, there's laborers who had a

better job and more money in 18 months than they had in the last 10 years. How crazy is that?

*Mike Kearney:* Yeah. Once again, it's opportunity out of crisis.

*James Gore:* Yeah. So, you know, there's loans out there from the SBA that work pretty well for small businesses, but the good thing about business people is they're used to adapting.

*Mike Kearney:* Right. It's in their DNA.

*James Gore:* And so they don't scream as much and complain as much about the inequities that exist. They kinda just bootstrap or they get screwed, like my dear friend Ann, who lost all of her business and had to shut down her B&B and sell her lodging.

*Mike Kearney:* What about housing?

*James Gore:* Oh, God.

*Mike Kearney:* Housing was an issue before. It's probably a bigger issue now. Actually, I know it is.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* What are you guys doing to rebuild? And then also maybe if you could intertwine in that response rebuild in a more resilient way.

*James Gore:* Yeah. We had a housing crisis before, and it turned into a housing nightmare after. We had less than one percent vacancy, which means, really, functionally no vacancy rate in Sonoma County. And in one degree where the insurance companies would not, you know, there's been issues about full payment to people for rebuild where they were very generous because they had to be, but they were—is paying people rent locally.

So you had houses that because of anti-gouging and price gouging laws, if you had a house on the market beforehand and it was \$1500, you can't escalate it more than 20 percent afterwards. But if you didn't have a house on the market before and you said, "Oh, well, I'm gonna rent this out," there's people who were renting those houses out to insurance companies for \$6,000 to \$8,000.

*Mike Kearney:* Wow.

*James Gore:* There's insurance companies that are paying up to I've heard \$16,000, \$18,000 for people who were living in really beautiful, big houses up in the top of Fountain Grove, the mansions, that are renting 'em out. So it just throws everything into flux. It's funny money. And so, on one side, it just is crazy.

And we also did this very in-depth survey that showed that we have really 10,000 people in the county who are on kind of the cusp of homelessness. And we all know that if people fall into homelessness, it's very hard to get them back out because people cannot progress when they're in an unstable environment without rest, without care. Right?

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* So 5,000 of those people are a direct result of the fires, from our studies, and so we're doing everything we can to do rapid re-housing and get things done right. On the side of rebuilding more resilient, the thing to realize is that already California code is one of the highest in the nation in terms of building resilient, with fire sprinklers in appropriate areas, fire safe roofs, Cal Fire requirements on roofs and the WUI, in the wild-urban interface area.

And also this fire burnt down houses and melted aluminum, which means it burnt at more than 1,650 degrees. So you have this crazy kind of dichotomy where you say, okay, some people are like, "Well, I need every house here to be built back so that it could withstand a fire." The real issue is the legacy houses, the fact that 90-plus percent of the houses out there, 95 percent plus, did not burn, and those are the ones that are not up to code.

So you have a large degree that are going up to code, which is a very good thing for all of us. You have quite a few people who are going above and beyond that. And we're actually trying to provide, coming up in the next six to eight months, a home hardening program for those legacy homes, and also home rebuilders, so they can build, basically, to withstand these kind of elements, and also try and find the right kind of incentives, both from the carrot side and also the stick side, on regulations for vegetation management so that people have to have defensible space.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* Once again, once again, this all comes back to personal accountability and responsibility. I had *LA Times* come to me and say, "Well, why aren't you guys forcing everybody to remove their brush?" And I said, "Because I don't have a satellite or five Apache helicopters to go over 15,000 blocks—

*Mike Kearney:* Observing and monitoring, yeah.

*James Gore:* —in Sonoma County, in the woodlands, under 50 acres, and put a red tag on everybody's lot and say they do it." There's a certain amount of risk. Like I have to hold to the fact that I live in the WUI, the wild-urban interface, and that's why I had to evacuate. That's why I had to set up for my drainage. That's why I had to evacuate from the fires.

*Mike Kearney:* Interesting. What about a couple last questions? And we've touched on this, but I don't know if you've got an additional take, and that is there's oftentimes this gap between people think they're prepared, and I actually see this in corporations all the time. We talk to CEOs in different type of crisis—not natural disaster—but they're always like, "We've got it." Until the crisis hits and they don't got it. What do you think's behind that? And is there anything that you could think that could be done?

And it goes back almost to the question that I had earlier about certain communities, where they see what has happened in Sonoma and they know that they're at risk, but they just don't do anything. Is there anything more that we can do, and this is a platform to share, to convince them that something needs to be done and you're probably not as prepared as you think you are? You never are prepared likely as you—

*James Gore:* God, I love that you're saying that because just, bingo. Ding, ding, ding. First thing is is how many people have a plan. Not a lot.

*Mike Kearney:* Well, you may have a plan—

*James Gore:* How many companies have a plan?

*Mike Kearney:* Well, and what's interesting, you could have a plan, but the plan means nothing 'cause oftentimes they're put and they're on a shelf or on somebody's laptop.

*James Gore:* Or they're given enough energy to do a cursory training once or twice a year where you identify people in different parts of your company, your government, your office structure, and they put on fluorescent vests and they show you where, like at a school, where you would evacuate to.

*Mike Kearney:* Right.

*James Gore:* That's about the gist of it. Our emergency management division before the fire was considered to be very high level around the state in terms of preparedness in their plans. Our fire was in our hazard mitigation plan. Let's put it that way. What wasn't there was the emphasis, the energy, the fact that emergency management department or a security group cannot be an adjunct to all of your work.

They were a bunker before. They were not either pushing into our other departments or into the community. They were also shirking that. They were almost built not to do public events, not to do preparedness fairs where you bring together firefighters and go bags and give them to people and presentations. I mean, the complacency of having a plan and figuring that you were ready was paramount.

And, to me, that's the big thing is that you gotta get it out in your community because everyone expects that you're gonna take care of it if you're in government or if you're in an authority position. And, ultimately, you can take a huge amount of responsibility, but you gotta put it back on the we, the collective we. And people just aren't doing that, man. They're not doing that. They're not taking it seriously.

And so I'll tell you how we're taking it seriously. Let me give you one example. One of the biggest things that we were burnt on by this fire, pun intended, in our community, was the fact that we did not send out a wireless emergency alert on that night of the fire. And about nine months before, our folks had decided that they didn't feel comfortable enough with that system from a technology perspective to be able to utilize it in that

circumstance. They were worried that it would overload 9-1-1, which it would have. They were worried that it would bleed over from trying to locate one area and it would go into an area where the fire wasn't and create cacophony in the community, which it would have.

So I don't say that they didn't do the right thing based on that. What I do criticize for all of us, and me included, is that we hadn't taken the upstream approach. We hadn't gone to San Diego and said, oh, they created a robust 2-1-1 system so that we don't overwhelm 9-1-1 and those systems. They hadn't done a community-wide test, which we have done now, the largest live code test in the nation, in Sonoma County last September, that tested it in bilingual in five different select areas.

So we were sitting on tools that we didn't use. And you cannot go through a disaster and say I didn't use everything at my disposal. You are not allowed that by your community. When your folks in the emergency operations center are writing a press release to make sure it's perfect, and hell has come into your community, and Facebook is alit with everything that's happening, and you're quiet, that is deafening.

*Mike Kearney:* It's not good. Yeah.

*James Gore:* So we had to get over that.

*Mike Kearney:* Let me ask you. So you talk, I'm guessing, to a lot of communities now that have gone through this or are going through this. If you were to talk to a community that the warning signs are there and I were to give you two or three things that you would say, "You must do this now," what would they be?

*James Gore:* So the first thing I would say is to my colleagues, to my county supervisors in the 58 counties in California and the 3,067 counties nationwide. I would say, "Go to your emergency management division. It's within your authority. Have them come to you and present your hazard mitigation plan to you." And then set up workshops. Set up four workshops a year to go over the hazards that you're worried about, some of those natural, some of those manmade.

So this year we had a flood workshop. And, go figure, it was right before our floods. Isn't that nice? We have an



earthquake workshop coming up. We're gonna do another fire workshop. And then we're gonna do cyber security. We also have active shooter drills that we're doing.

Okay, so on that side, institutionally figure out where you are and where the gap analysis is and ask your emergency managers: "Are you in the community or are you living in a bunker of an emergency management bunker?" and "What can I do to help you?"

Second, with people in the community, prepare yourself. You will get smacked. That is not a fearful thing. That is what resilience is about. It's not just being prepared. It's understanding that you will go through something that's difficult in your life that you have not prepared for. Get your kids ready. Get yourself ready. Get your business ready. Check your insurance. Check your other stuff. Train. The only responsibility and the accountability is on you. Laws will not protect you from yourself and your own complacency. It's on you.

Third thing: kids. Right? To go back from the system to our understanding as adults and what we need to own—whatever our job, whatever our place is in our community—but our kids. They're watching. I refuse to subject my two children to a pessimistic future. Refuse. And I'm tired of the fearmongering out there. So if you're gonna be a part of something, get involved in your school. Get involved in these other things. Do whatever you can to let them know what's going on so it's not a fearful thing when it smacks 'em.

*Mike Kearney:* That's a great—we're not done—but that was almost a great way to end it. I have two last questions.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* So, and this is actually a question I'm really interested to get your take on. I've started to ask this probably in the last five interviews that I've done, and it's going back to maybe some of your thoughts on your underlying purpose and role and how that's a platform. But I love this question—or, actually, I hate the question maybe is a better way of saying it—of like how do you define success. It's a cliché. I'm curious what would you exclude from your definition that many may include. What would you exclude from your definition of success that many would include?

*James Gore:* I would exclude the details. I feel that will is the only thing that pushes things forward, and I feel that it's all backwards. I am deductive, not inductive, in that sense. Everybody thinks that success and that success, whether it's personal, societal, whether it's emergency preparedness, is because of the plans you form, is because of the details you do, every transaction you put together, the strategic plan you've developed, the money you've set aside, and all these other things.

And I actually feel like it's all backwards. I feel like you have to embrace the energy of what is surrounding you. And the trend line of what the world is showing us right now is that we are under duress, so there's no better time to be resilient. There is no better time to focus on resilience and for us to have this conversation and be a part of this movement. So embrace that energy and it will lead you down the path of what you need to do.

*Mike Kearney:* There's a very Zen-like, live in the moment and realize everything that is there for you to be successful in the moment and not intrinsically by, like you said, money or how much you got in the bank or your role or what have you. I thought I stumped you on that one. That was one of the more interesting answers that I've gotten.

Last question: so the name of the podcast is *Resilient*. What would you say are some key characteristics of a resilient individual? And it could be somebody in politics. It could be just a person on the street. It could be somebody in business. It doesn't matter. And then is there somebody that stands out, where you'd say—and I'm sure you got a lot of good stories or people—is there somebody that really is emblematic of that resilient system of values?

*James Gore:* Resilience has started to get this interesting cachet.

*Mike Kearney:* It's almost overused, and that's the name of my podcast, so [*crosstalk*].

*James Gore:* The new sustainability.

*Mike Kearney:* Exactly. Yes.

*James Gore:* And people call me Captain Resilient because I'm chair of the Resilient Counties Initiative, chair of the California state one, on the Resilient America Roundtable.

*Mike Kearney:* Can I actually—in when we describe this podcast—can I say I'm interviewing Captain Resilient?

*James Gore:* Yeah. Absolutely. *Capitán*.

*Mike Kearney:* I'm sorry. I had to say that.

*James Gore:* No, I love that. So a lot of people think of resilience as being able to take a punch: I can keep going; I can keep going. I see it as I can take a punch and I can punch back harder. I take that energy. It's not boxing. It's Judo. How do I take your energy and put it back into the world in a better way? So many people think about like, "I'm getting bruised, and I can take so much, and I can get beat on."

And back to this point that you and I talked before is that, for me, this energy is in our community. This fire burnt us. I cannot take that energy away, but I can either use that fire and let it continue to smolder and create more ruins, or I can forge something out of it. I can take that fire and I can be a blacksmith, so use that energy, steer it. That is true resilience for me.

And who do I think of? Why does Muhammad Ali just throw into my head? I don't know why, but it just does. On the other side, Opal May Gore, OMG, my little girl. Jesus, she just inspires me, her and my little Jacob. They're running around.

*Mike Kearney:* Kids are the most resilient people out there oftentimes.

*James Gore:* Jesus, just –

*Mike Kearney:* How old are your kids?

*James Gore:* Seven and four.

*Mike Kearney:* Seven and four. I want to make a comment really quickly and then we'll close this out. I love asking that question about resilience 'cause I hear a different answer every time, and sometimes there's like a nugget. And what you gave me was actually a gift. It's the cliché answer is you get knocked down and you come back. And what you're saying is you get knocked down but you harness that

energy and then you give more energy in a positive manner in whatever you do.

*James Gore:* Yeah, use it.

*Mike Kearney:* And I actually think what's ironic about natural disasters or crises, it goes back to that community, I guess Coffey Park, where they held that potluck one year after.

*James Gore:* Yeah.

*Mike Kearney:* And in some respects they may say, "While we went through hell, in some respects our lives are better now," which is crazy I think in some ways. I don't know if you [*crosstalk*].

*James Gore:* So let's define for you—I love that. You just gave me the chills, and I love to chase the chills 'cause that means I'm connecting with what's important in this world. So there was another potluck the day before at Mark West Estates. I go there. I'm talking with people. We're milling around. One day before the anniversary. Heavy winds giving people all kinds of flashbacks, 35–40-mile-an-hour winds day before the anniversary, the one-year anniversary.

I look around that area and a couple things I saw during that moment. One, people smiling and hugging. Two, a couple people pointing up at the mountains having wind. Three, three people—two ladies and a guy—standing over in the corner, looking at the wind with a glass of wine in their hand and basically having Lieutenant Dan moments from *Forrest Gump*, like looking into it, going, "Come on."

*Mike Kearney:* Come on. When he's on top of the boat? Is that the \_\_\_\_\_?

*James Gore:* Come on.

*Mike Kearney:* The hurricane, yeah. We can take it.

*James Gore:* And then I hear this song playing, and it's "We Didn't Start the Fire." And I go over to somebody and I'm like, "What the hell? Are you playing this song on purpose?" And this gal shows me, she says, "Yeah. Look at this." She's got it on Spotify. It's called Tubbs Fire Resilient Playlist. Her playlist for their one-year anniversary is "We Didn't Start the Fire," "Burning down the House," "God

Take the Wheel," "I Hope You'll Dance." Fifteen other songs. How cool is that?

*Mike Kearney:* And the community coming together, and they probably would not have had some community event like that a year before.

*James Gore:* No, man.

*Mike Kearney:* That's awesome.

*James Gore:* Seventy-two percent of the houses in that neighborhood are rebuilding, the highest rate I've seen anywhere. You know why? Because they've come together as a community. They're not rebuilding as individuals. That's resilience.

*[Music playing]*

*Mike Kearney:* What a great way to end it. James, thank you.

*James Gore:* Thanks, man.

*Mike Kearney:* Wow, that was incredible, that last couple minutes. Whew. That was great. James, thank you for your time. The hair on the back of my neck is just standing up. That was awesome, so thank you, thank you, thank you.

And thank you to all of you who subscribe and listen to *Resilient*, a Deloitte podcast produced by our friends at Rivet Radio. I love saying that. You can find us at [www.deloitte.com](http://www.deloitte.com) or you could visit your favorite podcatcher, keyword "resilient." When I talk about podcatcher, I mean things like iTunes, SoundCloud, Google Play, even Spotify.

Check out some of our previous episodes, great interviews with CEOs, board members, and other leaders, and now a politician. If you like these conversations and specifically if you like today's conversation, check out my interview with Mark Riley, at the time the deputy director of disaster recovery for the state of Louisiana. He was instrumental in helping Louisiana recover from Katrina and several other natural disasters.

If you're enjoying these conversations, please share them with your work colleagues, family, or friends. I love when I get folks that aren't even in the business world saying,

“Oh, I listened to your interview with so-and-so and it was fantastic.” So even if you’re not a business person or somebody in the business world, even your family or friends may enjoy listening to *Resilient*. There’s a lot of takeaways that I think are helpful for anyone.

And I’d be extremely grateful if you could spend just one minute providing us with a rating. Ratings play such a large role in how much the podcast gets promoted in places like iTunes. And speaking of iTunes, we’re almost at 100 ratings and, God, I would love to get there, so anything you could do to get me there, greatly appreciated. Also, if you have any comments on today’s episode or recommendations for future guests, hit me up on LinkedIn or Twitter. Twitter I’m @MKearney33. LinkedIn pretty easy: Michael Kearney with Deloitte.

Let me close this out with a quote from Nelson Mandela that really sums up the strength and resolve of the people that were impacted by the North Bay fires. “The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fail.”

*[End of Audio]*

This document contains general information only and Deloitte Risk and Financial Advisory is not, by means of this document, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This document is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional advisor. Deloitte Risk and Financial Advisory shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this document.

As used in this document, “Deloitte Risk and Financial Advisory” means Deloitte & Touche LLP, which provides audit and enterprise risk services; Deloitte Financial Advisory Services LLP, which provides forensic, dispute, and other consulting services, and its affiliate, Deloitte Transactions and Business Analytics LLP, which provides a wide range of advisory and analytics services. Deloitte Transactions and Business Analytics LLP is not a certified public accounting firm. These entities are separate subsidiaries of Deloitte LLP. Please see [www.deloitte.com/us/about](http://www.deloitte.com/us/about) for a detailed description of the legal structure of Deloitte LLP and its subsidiaries. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

Copyright © 2019 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved