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**Announcer:** There are a few things that make people successful. Taking a step forward to change their lives is one successful trait, but it takes some time to get there. How do you move forward to greet the success that awaits you? Welcome to *Next Steps Forward* with host Chris Meek. Each week, Chris brings on another guest who has successfully taken the next steps forward. Now here is Chris Meek.

**Chris Meek:** Hello. I'm Chris Meek, and you've tuned in to this week's episode of *Next Steps Forward*. As always, it's a pleasure to have you with us again. Our guest today is Eric Caron. Eric is a retired US diplomat, US special agent, and HSBC Middle East Bank executive. He's also the author of *Switched On: The Heart and Mind of a Special Agent* and an adjunct professor at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy on Cape Cod, where he teaches a course on how to identify and prevent transnational crime and cybersecurity.

Eric has held senior positions within the US Department of Treasury, Department of Homeland Security, and Interpol. Throughout his career, he has successfully initiated and managed covert operations that identified and disrupted international weapons of mass destruction, proliferation networks, terrorism, terror financing, and transnational criminal networks involved in drug smuggling, human trafficking, and intellectual property rights violations. Man, do I feel like an underachiever compared to all that?

He has currently been traveling and mentoring African officials over the past few years on how to disrupt and dismantle transnational and terror groups from destroying our environment, specifically the poaching of endangered wildlife and illegal logging. Eric is one of seven children and a fraternal twin. His late father was a decorated New Bedford Massachusetts police officer and a Marine. He believes, as his father taught him, the family, country, and God come first. Amen to that, brother. He also strongly believes that, as John Adams once said, we are a nation of laws, not of men, and no man or institution is above the law. Eric Caron, welcome to *Next Steps Forward*.

**Eric Caron:** Hey, what an honor to be on with you, Chris. I look forward to our conversation and sharing my life story.

**Chris:** It's going to be a great conversation. I like to brag that this show is a show of firsts, and that introduction got a lot of firsts in there. We can check a lot of boxes on there, so thanks for all you've done for our country. Thank you.

**Eric:** Thank you, sir.

**Chris:** To that point, Eric, you've had such an extraordinary career, and in fact, several extraordinary careers, actually. What are you passionate about these days? What gets you out of bed in the morning and gets you going now that you aren't doing things like disrupting weapons of mass destruction, proliferation networks, I can't even say it, drug smugglers, and international counterfeiting rings?

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**Eric:** Chris, what gets me out of bed these days really is the opportunity to travel this country, in fact, travel the world, and share my switched on life story, my switched on life philosophy because if I did not live my switched on life philosophy, I would be dead today, and that's no joke. Life is hard and life comes out as fast and furious, as we all know. Your mother dies, your father dies, your twin brother dies, your wife decides she doesn't want to be married anymore, your nephew dies in a car accident. Yes, that all happened to me, Chris. I love sharing the principles of living a switched on life because even in darkness, if you're living the switched on life philosophies, you can still see a path to greatness.

**Chris:** Eric, sticking with a show of firsts, let's go off-script. Let's talk about your switched-on philosophy. Why don't you share that with everybody?

**Eric:** Yes. [chuckles] First, I learned this at a young age from my Marine Corps father. My father, a shoeshine boy in the 1930s and '40s, uneducated, taught me everything I needed to know in life at a very young age. The three core principles, I kept it simple, for me to live a happy successful life were strengthening the mind through education. It's a ticket to life's party. Without it, you're not getting in. Number one, the mind. Number two, the body. Sleep, eat, and exercise every single day. Sleep, eat, and exercise, the C philosophy.

Then, of course, faith, strengthening the soul through faith. Faith and fear, two opposing things, if you will, and it's all about living in faith that everything's going to be okay. I like to say faith is like the wind, you can't see it but you feel it and you have to believe it. I dive deeper into the mind, body, and soul. They're equally important. That's what's important to understand that I think we've lost our way. We think taking a pill is the answer. It's not for the most part. The mind, body, and soul I see it as a Venn diagram, and I describe it and I show it as a Venn diagram. The mind, body, and soul. Equally important, interrelated, and they have to be fed every day.

What did I do when I got up this morning? I got on my floor and I meditated, and I did my stretches, and I did my push-ups and sit-ups, and I went for a walk or a run. I have to do it. That's my therapy. It keeps me alive and balanced. So many people are off balance, Chris, in this country, and they think taking a drug, a pill, either prescribed or not, is going to make things better. It's not. Strengthen the mind, body, and soul, and you're on your way to a happier life, and you can overcome adversities.

**Chris:** It's that simple. Eat, sleep, and exercise.

**Eric:** Yes.

**Chris:** Why do we make it so complicated?

**Eric:** Yes. I hear you, brother. We've got so many gurus on TV talking about taking pills and this contraption and do this and do that. We've lost our way in our nation. I like to say let's keep it simple, and the three most important things we do every day

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is strengthening the mind, body, and soul. You know through sleeping properly, just sleeping heals the mind and the body. It makes the mind grow. Exercising, Chris, studies have shown that through exercise, there's a molecule that's released in the body, in the mind that helps us survive and keeps disease away and strengthens our minds.

It's actually a happy molecule, it's been described as, just by moving, just by exercising. We don't need to take that extra drink or smoke that we need to feel good. All we got to do is simply move our bodies, and it's not doing a marathon. There are simple things that I talk about when I lecture about how to live a switched on life. I'm passionate about talking and saving lives as you are, Chris. Anybody looking for a guest speaker, I'll do it for free for God's sakes, and come to your church, and come to your PTA meetings, and talk about how to live a switched on life.

**Chris:** You mentioned your dad earlier as a shoeshine boy, who was a police officer, Marine, obviously an inspiration to you.

**Eric:** Yes.

**Chris:** Why did you choose to be a US special agent instead of a city police officer, and what did it take to become a special agent?

**Eric:** Wow. That's a great question. I think you're going to be surprised, maybe not, by my answer. It was through a tragedy that I became an agent. Chris, at the age of 15, my dad died. It still makes me emotional today that my hero suddenly passed from a massive heart attack on the job, but that death put me on a path to where I am today, of service to God and country, and family. Through his tragic death, and I remember when the light bulb went on, when God, or the universe, or whoever you believe in spoke to me that this death of my father will be used in such a way that it will change lives around this world. I'm proud to say that I have.

**Chris:** We're going to touch on that in a bit in the show. Can you recall any specific experiences or moments from your childhood or adolescence that sparked your interest in law enforcement, or was it really your dad calling you?

**Eric:** Yes. I think much like, say, a priest, and in many jobs, doctor, it's a calling that is in you. Yes, I was fortunate that I had a dad for 15 years who inspired me and made me think and made me appreciate God and family. He was such a great role model for me, and that's what's missing in America today. We're a fatherless society. We're a Godless and fatherless society. Is there any wonder why our country is in the pain that we see it in? Most of our families don't have a father, especially in the inner city. My dad was a great role model for me.

Actually, I was going to be a chef. I was an average, if you will, student. My twin brother was an excellent athlete, so he went on to a traditional high school and I went to a trade school because my parents thought, "You know what? I think you'll be successful as a cook, as a chef, Eric, because you like working in the kitchen. I do. I still make a mean chocolate tart.

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When my dad died, I went back to what I believe was my purpose in life. It instantly came to me that I was made to be a law enforcement officer, to help others, to serve others. Half in my sophomore year, beginning of my sophomore year at a vocational school, I started preparing for college. Again, the death of my dad jilted me, if you will, on a path to where I am today.

**Chris:** Did you ever feel pressure to live up to certain expectations because of your father's career? Was it a good thing or a bad thing?

**Eric:** Again, I use my dad as inspiration. My dad set the bar high, and his integrity, his honesty, his discipline, his love for his country, his family, so I never really felt that from my dad because he taught me so well. His philosophy was simple in life really as at a young age. "Just whatever you're doing, Eric, just be happy and be the best at what you're doing." He used to say, "I don't care if you're a garbage man, Eric and Eddie. Be the best garbage man that you can be." My dad was an inspiration. I speak to him every day.

**Chris:** We talk a lot about resilience and personal well-being in *Next Steps Forward*, and a few people would need more resilience than some in your profession and the stresses that put you through. How would you define resilience, and especially in the context of your role as a special agent, and how do you develop and maintain your resilience?

**Eric:** Again, great question. Again, life is hard. Life as an agent, you got your personal life, your family as far as your wife or your husband, you got your children. You got your home, if you will, responsibilities. Then you got the office. In the office, you have transnational criminal groups wearing on you every day. You're involved in covert operations, undercover operations that good guys' lives are at stake. You're dealing with drug smugglers and human traffickers and child pornographers and arms traffickers, traveling the country, traveling the world.

Again, it's easy to go to the dark side in life. I don't fault or judge, I should say, good guys who go bad because I know the temptations are out there. You have those temptations in front of you every day. I was involved in a drug case. Driving down the road-- Actually, we did a search warrant, and at the house, it was money, a lot of money. When the case agent looked at me as a young agent, "Hey, Eric, you want to drive the money back to the office?" I said, "Sure." I'm driving down the road with about \$500,000 in cash and about eight boxes behind me by myself.

I'm thinking to myself, "Wow, I could very easily reach back and take a handful of cash and stick it under my seat or in my pants, and no one would know." You're surrounded by temptations. I didn't, by the way. You're surrounded by temptations every day as an agent. That's why I had to live the switched on life philosophy, mind, body, and soul every day, and strengthening all of them, equally important, so I could live a happy, healthy, straight, if you will, life as an agent because you can't turn it off at 8 hours, 12 hours. You go home and your phone is ringing off the hook. Bad guys don't sleep.

Then your wife is complaining about you haven't spent enough time with the kids, you've been traveling too much, you've been distant. I've been distant because I'm involved in a covert operation, undercover operation, and I'm trying to figure out how to get into this bad guy. There's all that stress at home, all that stress and the frustration of prosecuting bad guys. That's why, again, living the switched on life philosophy was imperative and it's still imperative for me today.

**Chris:** There are two kinds of resilience, there's physical and mental and emotional. Was either one of them more valuable than the other during your times as a special agent?

**Eric:** Both. Again, the mind, body, and soul, equally important. They have to be practiced and strengthened, fed every day. They're equally important, Chris. The mind, body, and soul, you got to strengthen them, you got to feed them because, again, you're going to get that Monday morning call at 8:00 AM that your mother, your father, your brother just died. You better be ready for it because it's coming.

The yin and yang of life, that's what we're here for. In some respects, I was fortunate because at a young age, I had the experience of death in my life and tragedies, so I understand how important it is to feed the mind, body, and soul every day so we can make good decisions. I can't make good decisions. Is it a shoot or no shoot situation? The bad guy wants to meet at this location. Should we meet him there or should we meet him at this location?

Why is the bad guy asking to meet us at his location? Let's take a look, understand, are we being set up? Is it a safe area? Is it a dangerous area? How are we going to extract the undercover agent if he gets in trouble? I could not make these life-and-death decisions every day of my life if my mind, body, and soul wasn't being properly fed.

**Chris:** What coping strategies do you employ to manage stress and maintain resilience over the long term?

**Eric:** Again, I practice the feeding the mind, body, and soul every day. Of course, getting that proper sleep, getting proper nutrition, and praying a little bit that everything is going to be okay. I have to do that. I have to exercise every day as well. For what it's worth, yoga is a great, great exercise for the body, but it's even better for the mind. One of the best exercises that I've discovered in my research relating to the switched on life philosophy is swimming.

Studies have shown that swimming not only is it, of course, strengthening the body through the exercise and the strokes, but there's something going on in the mind that it's actually strengthening the mind because of the concentration that's happening relating to the breath and the body itself and the exercise. Swimming is one of the best overall exercises for the mind and the body.

**Chris:** So many times it can be difficult just working with a person sitting at the desk next to you. Teamwork is so important in law enforcement and successful

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investigations, but it has to be especially challenging working across jurisdictions and international borders. What were your cues to success when it comes to teamwork?

**Eric:** Yes. First of all, there's no I in team. I've led an office of agents in Boston and Providence, Rhode Island, overseas in Dubai, I led the office in the United Arab Emirates, a group of agents as well as other officials, analysts, task force officers from a local police or state police. You have a hodgepodge of people and personalities. Mostly men. Some women, but mostly men with big egos and type-A personalities. As a manager, you have to understand each and every asset, each and every person. What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses? How am I going to help them overcome their weaknesses?

Understanding collectively as a group, making sure they all understand what the plan of action is, making sure they all understand the importance of each of them to the case. I'll say to the puzzle, that they all serve as a piece of this puzzle equally important. I've been involved in situations where I had a minor role to play, but if I didn't execute, then that would affect everybody else above me, if you will, or the case. Everyone's role is important and understanding that it takes a team to be successful in life. It really does.

**Chris:** How do you remain adaptable and flexible in dynamic and unpredictable situations, and can you provide examples of how you've successfully adapted to changing circumstances?

**Eric:** I think training. Of course, education training is important, that muscle memory that you build when you're educated, when you train. Understanding the plan and understanding the backup plan, if you will, "If X happens, then I'll do Y," that's very important. Planning. education is critical. No matter what we do in life, and it was very important as an agent to plan properly, educate, practice, visualization is important. Visualizing what we're doing and how we doing it, and if something was to happen, how do we recover? Yes, visualization is important.

**Chris:** What measures do you take to prioritize your physical and mental well-being amidst the demands of your job?

**Eric:** For me, Chris, it beats sitting in a therapy chair that I make me, Eric, the number one priority each day. Not in a selfish way, but if I'm off balance and my mind, body, and soul is not being fed, I can't help anyone. I can't help Chris. I can't help my sons. I can't help anybody if I don't prioritize me first in a healthy, balanced way. I'm strengthening my mind, body, and soul every day.

Again, it's not necessarily for, "Look at my muscles, look at me," it's for in here because as you think, Chris, so shall you become. I think Bruce Lee said that. How many people do you know and I know are on some form of medication because they're not making themselves a priority. For whatever reason, they're making others or other things a priority. Make yourself a priority, get your life in order, start strengthening the mind, body, and soul, then you can help others.



**Chris:** I'd be remiss if I didn't ask where can people learn more about you and the switched on life.

**Eric:** Thank you, Chris. It's switched on life is my website. switched on life is my website. The book and the audiobook is on Amazon. It's on my website as well, but the audiobook is on Amazon. It's outstanding. I tried doing the voice, but it would have taken me like five years to do it.

**Chris:** [laughs]

**Eric:** I hired a voice actor. I know my story is impactful and life-changing because the director came back to me weeks later after he was done, he goes, "Eric, I want you to know Joe wanted me to tell you that this is the first time in doing this as a career, as a voice actor, that he cried about six times." I'm thinking, "Yes," because that's what you want. You want the reader to be moved to action. The audiobook is inspirational. I got a little music sprinkled in. Amazon is a great place to find it or wherever you find your fine books.

**Chris:** We've been talking to Eric Caron. He'll be right back after a short break.

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**Chris:** We are back. I'm Chris Meek, host of *Next Steps Forward*. My guest today is Eric Caron. Eric is a retired US diplomat, US special agent, and HSBC Middle East Bank executive. He's also the author of *Switched On: The Heart and Mind of a Special Agent* and an adjunct professor at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy on Cape Cod, where he teaches a course on how to identify and prevent transnational crime and cybersecurity. Eric has held senior positions with the US Department of Treasury, Department of Homeland Security, and Interpol.

Throughout his career, he successfully initiated and managed covert operations that identified and disrupted international weapons of mass destruction, proliferation networks, terrorism, terror financing, and transnational criminal networks involved in drug smuggling, human trafficking, intellectual property rights violations. Eric, again, we're going to go a little bit off-script. We're talking during the break. Explain what money laundering is and how it typically occurs, and how or why does it affects the person listening to our conversation right now.

**Eric:** Chris, let me ask you, why do people commit crime?

**Chris:** Because they think they get away with it.

**Eric:** For money. Most crimes are committed for money, unless it's usually a crime of passion like homicide, murder. Most crimes are conducted, if you will, for money. Let's, for instance, say I'm a drug smuggler. I just got paid \$1 million cash. I got to do something with that money. Bad guys, what they want to do is hide the source of that money. They have to clean it, make it look legit. Make that drug money that I just got, \$1 million, for instance, I have to make it look like it's gotten from a legal job of some sort. I have to wash it, I have to clean it to make it appear to be legit.

There's a few different methods in doing so. The first is placement, if you will. Placing dirty money into banks or front companies. For instance, I go to the bank and deposit the dirty money, the \$1 million, in different bank accounts and I split it up. Then I have to layer it. Maybe I start moving it to various bank accounts to make it look like a legitimate purchase. Maybe I have a buddy in Columbia or in Mexico or in the Netherlands and maybe he has a front company, I make it look like maybe it's payments, maybe I dummy up invoices, so layering. We have placement, layering, and then, of course, integration. The three steps, if you will, of money laundering, placement, layering, integration.



Integration is simply buying things. Now, it could be the house, could be the boat, or any other products, or maybe I co-mingle, maybe I have a company and maybe I buy more washing machines to sell with dirty money. That's basically it as far as money laundering is concerned. It can be difficult to detect, but we've now have in place good partnerships with our financial institutions throughout the world, good software, good investigators who understand money laundering, understand the red flags of money laundering so we can dismantle these transnational crime groups and terror groups.

**Chris:** You talk about the financial institutions. How do they contribute to or combat money laundering? You talked about software, how's technology helping the government get better at stopping it?

**Eric:** Good question. We rely heavily on banks to partner with the good guys, if you will. There are certain legal protocols in place that require banks to file different reports to regulators and federal government because there's state officials, the federal officials. It can be daunting task to keep up with all the regulations, but they're there to make sure they're not touching dirty money, and that their customers aren't dirty.

The banks are required to fill out what they call suspicious activity reports, SARs, suspicious activity reports. That's been talked about in the last year or so relating to the current administration and the fact that banks filed SARs on Hunter Biden and Joe Biden and others because they're required to because if they don't, they potentially face penalties. Banks are actively working to stop money laundering because it affects our nation. Corruption increases if you allow money laundering. It's important that banks partner with federal authorities and state authorities to stop money laundering.

**Chris:** I live about 35, 40 miles outside New York City, and I always scratch my head when I walk through Times Square and you see dozens of these souvenir stores. Now, I know that a lot of tourists come to New York, I know they all go to Times Square. I always scratch their head and think, "Can they really stay afloat? I know how much rent costs in Times Square. Is this a front for something else?" I'm just curious your thoughts.

**Eric:** Yes. To charge, understand, Chris, for the federal government, and the federal government is the only entity, federal agencies, be it the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations, IRS-- There's only a handful of federal agencies that can charge money laundering. You'll never see a state agency charge money laundering because it's not a state charge. To charge money laundering, you need a specified unlawful act first that serves as the foundation. You don't see a standalone charge of, "I'm going to charge Eric with money laundering alone."

The specified unlawful act for Eric, because I'm an international drug smuggler, I'm smuggling drugs, the proceeds stem from specified unlawful act, which is drug smuggling. It could be human trafficking, it could be arms trafficking. There's over a

dozen different crimes that serve as the specified unlawful act to charge money laundering. One of them is counterfeiting, so IPR violations that you see all the counterfeits in New York Times Square.

If the authorities can build a case to show that the goods are indeed counterfeit and that the individual has knowledge and intent to distribute counterfeits, be it Gucci or Chanel or whatever, counterfeit Viagra pills, that's the specified unlawful act. Then you can charge money laundering if you can show and tie the money to the specified unlawful act. A lot of those shops in Times Square are certainly probably engaged in some form of illegal activity. Like you said, anybody with eyes to see and ears to hear understand that the rent alone is probably \$10,000, give or take, a month in Times Square and they're selling bags.

That's why it's important that our federal authorities and state authorities don't allow crime to grow because it's like cancer. As we have seen it over the last few years, Chris, crime has grown in our cities. It's because police officers at the local, state, and federal level have, quite frankly, been neutered. It's sad because you know what, Chris? They stand in the gap between good and evil every day. There's a lot of evil out there. I've seen it. Many people in this country sit back and they have these lovely homes in these bedroom communities and they don't get a chance to go to Chicago, nor do they want to go to Chicago or care to go to Chicago, New York, or Newark or Philly.

The good guys of law enforcement go and they have to take down, if you will, in a legal way, of course, the bad guys because the bad guys will continue to commit crime of rape and destruction and murder and theft if you allow them. As a nation, these last three, four years, we have allowed criminals to hurt and maim good Americans, and that should not happen.

**Chris:** The next topic is one that unfortunately we have to talk about and to address. Most recently, we had-- I believe was our 24th mass shooting of the year. Today is March 19th. That's one about every three-ish days, three or four days.

**Eric:** Yes.

**Chris:** I think one of the questions that a lot of Americans find themselves asking is how to best protect themselves and their families from violence and specifically active shooters.

**Eric:** Great question, Chris. Great. Thank you. I wrote an article, it's up on my website, switched on life, how America failed its students. Our students have to go to school every day wondering whether or not they're going to make it home. Are you kidding me? Between knives and guns, most students in America are afraid to go to school. We have failed our students, our kids in America. Why? Because, again, we've become a fatherless society, a godless society. We're not teaching basic life, if you will, principles that are so important, service to others. It goes on and on. It's important now than ever that we get switched on. First, the mind, body, and soul. That's important. That's the foundation.

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Relating to these active shooters and traumatic incidences, I wrote an article about five to survive, five simple tips to survive active shooters and threats as such. First, we have to get switched on, the mind, body, and soul, because if we're not living the switched on philosophy, we can't think appropriately, if you will. That has to be the core principle first, foundation, the switched on. Then how to identify bad guys. I talk about, number one, engaging all senses and trust your instincts. You want to be able to see like Clark Kent. You want to be able to hear and smell like a K9 when you're out on the street. Engage our senses and trust instincts.

Number two, scan the environment and plan. Simple. I want to make sure this is clear to you, Chris, too and the viewers. I don't want anybody to be hypervigilant. I want this to be like brushing your teeth every day. I want this to be natural, that this becomes part of your everyday wellbeing, is understanding living the switched on life philosophy and then understanding the five to survive points. Again, one, engage all your senses and your instincts. Scan the environment and plan. Identify a primary and a secondary entrance, exit to wherever you're going. Safe havens in those establishments.

Where am I going when poop hits the fan? How am I getting out of this building or where do I go when a terrorist enters the hotel? I know. I've been there. I go to the basement because that's where the safe room is. It's a safe. When I left Afghanistan one year, just as I left, the Taliban hit the place I was at and killed a bunch of people. I knew exactly where that safe haven was in the basement of that hotel, in the kitchen and how many stairs it took for me to get downstairs. Understanding the difference between cover and concealment, understanding that not everything that you hide behind is going to stop a bullet.

If I'm behind a refrigerator, that's a good thing, but if I'm behind a piece of, I don't know, wooden table, if you will, or underneath, that may not stop a bullet from penetrating and hitting me. Again, engage all instincts, scan the environment, scan for people. How many instances, Chris, do I hear pretty much every week, "Yes, that person looked off. He had a backpack," or, "He was talking to himself. He was standing in the corner for about an hour talking to himself. Little off."? If you see something, say something, NYPD's famous motto.

Scan for people that maybe don't belong or maybe wearing clothes that, "Geez, why has he got a heavy jacket on or a big backpack like it's full of explosives on the church steps in New York City?" Scan for people that don't belong or out of the ordinary. Breathe. Number four, breathe. Actually, breathe. Hear and focus on the breath. As an agent, in training and search warrants and arrests, if you will, going in hot into a crack house, if you will, drug house at 6:00 AM, knowing there's bad guys behind that door and guns as well, Colombians, usually about 8 to 10 of us, if I hit the door and holding my breath, do you think I can think straight? No.

That breath that I talk about is like the fighter pilots fighting Gs. When you're in a stressful situation, whatever it is, especially during an after-shooter situation, breathe. Breathe in such a way that you hear your breath. It's like [breathing]

because that breaks tunnel vision, number one, because you're going to be, "Do I fight a flight?" You don't want to freeze, you want to go to that plan that you have back here. You want to bring that plan forward to the P brain here. If I'm holding my breath, it's going to be difficult for me to think relating to, where am I going? What am I doing? What's the plan of action that I have back here? Breathing helps us escape, helps us get to that plan of action in the back of the mind.

Then number five, just like number one, it should be number one as well, engaging senses and trust your instincts. My mantra, your mantra, from today on, Chris, wherever you go, I want you to identify threats in your physical as well as your emotional world. I want you to avoid those threats. I want you to escape those threats because once the bullets start flying, there's, or fist, no telling how it ends.

What I preach, Chris, is identify threats. Avoid and escape both on the street and in your personal life, in your marriages, with your kids. Five to survive, it's up on my website, [switchedonlife.com](http://switchedonlife.com). I think it's imperative that we understand. Train the mind, the body will follow. Train the mind, the body will follow, Chris. If you don't, potentially you die. That is so important that for you and your audience to understand, you have to train the mind or the body will die because we're looking for a plan of action. If it's not there, we're going to freeze, and that's when people get hurt.

**Chris:** A few minutes ago, you mentioned crime being on the rise. You just talked about the Taliban. As you look at our southern border, how do you assess the threats of terrorists entering the US from Mexico?

**Eric:** High. Extremely high. Now, there are so many threats going on right now, Chris, across this globe. Unfortunately, Americans think, "That's happening 8,000 miles away. That's not going to affect us." What happened on 9/11? Osama Bin Laden was hatched out of Sudan in Africa and we didn't take him out when we had the opportunity. He went on to Afghanistan where he planned 9/11. That, Chris, unfortunately, is happening again today.

It's not just the Mexican cartels because they're terror organizations. They should be sanctioned as a terrorist organization. Don't ask me why they're not, but there's a top four, five cartels in Mexico that we know who they are and they're responsible for what? I think since 2000. This number should stagger everybody. A million people in America have died from overdose. How about that? I know because I researched it. A million people died in America. That's the size, I think, of-- I think it's Phoenix, Tampa, I don't know. About that, gone. A million people from drug overdose, mostly from Mexico, are coming across the Mexican border.

Maybe it starts off in Columbia or Bolivia or Peru, comes through Mexico. Mexico, the cartels are manufacturing their own cocaine now. A million people have died. When are we going to wake up? On average, 50,000 Americans die from suicide every year. 50,000 Americans that we know of die from suicide every year. We can do better. We have to do better. I'm very concerned that right now our southern

border is wide open. Chris, understand, there's 328 official ports of entry into America. Land, air, sea. We don't talk about the shipping containers that come into America on vessels or on rail that aren't being looked at. Less than 2% are being physically opened.

We have the Taliban controlled of Afghanistan. A terror organization is in control in Afghanistan. I've seen the reports. I've sources all over the world. Some of this has been reported, Chris, but what's happening in Afghanistan should frighten every single American right now. The Taliban has implemented dozens of schools for terrorist training. They have a suicide brigade in Afghanistan, military. The Taliban has a suicide brigade. They're issuing passports. How are they issuing passports? What's the vetting process happening in Afghanistan right now? Who's vetting these people? We know people responsible for the Benghazi assault that killed our ambassador are in Afghanistan today.

The world is very, very dangerous right now with dozens of terror groups in the Middle East, as well as Africa. No one's talking about Africa. I just came back from Africa. It's been my 9th or 10th trip to Africa in the last year and a half and I can tell you ISIS is active throughout Africa. We have 22 secret wars going on, we the US government, fighting ISIS and Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, including Boko Haram, in Africa. The situation in Africa right now, as we know, in Sudan and South Sudan and Chad, Niger is very, very dangerous. If we don't think that what's happening in Africa won't affect us, again, Chris, just go back to 9/11.

**Chris:** Eric, thanks so much for being with us today. We're out of time. I'm Chris Meek. We'll see you next week, same time, same place. Until then, stay safe and keep taking your next steps forward.

**Announcer:** Thanks for tuning in to *Next Steps Forward*. Be sure to join Chris Meek for another great show next Tuesday at 10:00 AM Pacific Time and 1:00 PM Eastern Time on the Voice America Empowerment Channel. This week make things happen in your life.

[music]

**[00:55:54] [END OF AUDIO]**