

## Episode 15: A Conversation with Two Criminal Justice Professors

Speaker 1:

Saint Leo 360, a 360 degree overview of the Saint Leo University community.

Greg Lindberg:

Hi, there and welcome to another episode of the Saint Leo 360 Podcast. This is your host Greg Lindberg. On this episode, it's a pleasure to be joined by two esteemed faculty members, here at Saint Leo University in our criminal justice department. We have Dr. Phillip Neely with us, who is a professor and the chair of the Department of Criminal Justice. Dr. Neely, welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Thank you. Glad to be here.

Greg Lindberg:

Absolutely. Then, we're also joined by Dr. Joseph Cillo, who actually likes to be called just Cillo as I know very well and Cillo is an assistant professor and has been here for several years as well. Dr. Cillo, welcome to the podcast.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

It's a pleasure and a joy to be here. It really is. Thank you.

Greg Lindberg:

Sure thing. All right, so I definitely want to delve into both of your backgrounds and then about how you came to Saint Leo and the different courses and programs that you teach. Dr. Neely, let's start with you. Talk to me about your background in criminal justice prior to getting into higher education.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Yes, sir. I was a police officer in the Atlanta metropolitan area for over 25 years. I worked in every area of law enforcement, from patrolman, investigator, all the way up to the rank of major at a sheriff's office upon leaving. I love what I do. I love criminal justice. I love the study, I love the feel of research, especially involving public policy. One of the things that drove me to Saint Leo, I was teaching at the police academy and a guy came up and says, "Why don't you teach as an adjunct at the university?" I said, "Well, I don't know." It was funny because he took me over to Saint Leo and I ended up beginning to teach as an adjunct and eventually that led to a full time position, but as far as law enforcement, it's been a very, very exciting career.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

I still practice law enforcement. I work with police agencies, now writing policies. My background and my research and my dissertation looks at the impact of job related stresses on excessive force by police officers. I help agencies write policies and plans for their accreditations to make sure their officers stay out of the legal realm and have the legal understanding of what officers need to be doing and what they should not be doing in the field to protect the organization.

Greg Lindberg:

I see. Very interesting. I'm curious, what were some of the big takeaways from your career prior to getting into higher ed?

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Dr. Phillip Neely:

Well, it's been a long journey in law enforcement. I've been in several shootings. I've worked as an investigator where I had to investigate my own, working over in internal affairs. Policing the police, which is always difficult because you find out things you really didn't believe that was happening when you're working in internal affairs. I think the most critical aspect of my career was having guns pointed at me, trigger pulled at my head and I'm still alive to talk about it. I've been run over by a car in '93 working an accident. I'm not paralyzed. I know people that was hit very minor and they're paralyzed, so I thank God for that and just the investigative areas that led me to where I am, today. It's very rewarding to me.

Greg Lindberg:

Now, I know you are based out of our Atlanta education center. If you could just talk about the center environment. I know we have over 30 education centers around the country.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Correct. In seven different states. I actually instruct classes out of the Atlanta, Gwinnett and Morrow center, but now they combine the Morrow and Marietta center and made the Atlanta center, so I instruct classes out of the Atlanta and the Gwinnett centers and I mainly teach in the graduate department. I was hired as a graduate professor of criminal justice and I've been teaching graduate assisting Dr. Diemer with the DCJ, which is our doctoral criminal justice program for over the last... The doctorate of criminal justice over the last two years, at the Atlanta center for the last 12 years teaching classes, whether in person, online or by DTG video teaching technology.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

The center is really great. It gives our adult learners the opportunity to come back to school and get degrees. Good percentage of my students are current practitioners in the field, meaning they are law enforcement officers. They come to class in full uniform and I'm able to relate to them because they can't come to a traditional setting. That opportunity gives them the ability to feel comfortable in their learning environment, get their degree and advance through the program and go on and do great things, like get promoted or move on to the federal level, et cetera.

Greg Lindberg:

Let's talk about the strength of our criminal justice programs. I know criminal justice is really one of our cornerstone programs, here at Saint Leo and we offer associate through the doctoral degrees in this discipline. Talk to me about how do you think our criminal justice programs are perceived and viewed.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

We're viewed as one of the best programs nationally. Saint Leo is ranked nationally. One of the reasons why, we put the best people in the right places in our program. We have practitioners that have at least 15 years of supervisory experience in the field before coming to Saint Leo working as an adjunct or full time faculty. We vet all of our employees strongly before bringing them on. Once they're here, we train them. We develop them and we let them know that they are wanted, they are needed and they are a valuable part of team CJ. That's what we call it, team CJ. Every employee that comes in here feels comfortable. They work in a relaxed, free environment, they know they're going to get all the tools and training they need in order to be successful.

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Greg Lindberg:

Right, and I know our faculty, including both of you are certainly very experienced. We have a nice variety of faculty, if you could just talk in general terms about the criminal justice faculty, here.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Our faculty is great. Right now, next to me who will be speaking shortly will be my wing man. That's what I call him. He follows me up, makes sure I'm taken care of. It's Dr. Joseph Cillo. Then, the associate chair of the department, which is Dr. Monique Walker-Pickett. You think about her background is so diverse. She has a PhD from the University of Miami. She also has a law degree. She's a state certified attorney in the state of Florida, which a law degree from the University of Florida. David Persky the same. He holds a PhD and a JD. We have multiple faculty with different degrees and certifications.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

These things are what add value to our program. Good example, Dr. Diemer, who's been a police officer for over 40 years and he's still working, now as a police officer part time as he works for the doctorate Department of Criminal Justice, here at Saint Leo University. Karen May, she's a lieutenant with Dade City Police Department. She works in our program. Most of our faculty are still in touch. They still conduct research. They're still involved in that aspect of criminal justice and research that keeps them tied to the community, tied to the research, tied to what they do to make the learning environment here at the university, online or in the centers respectable.

Greg Lindberg:

That's very well said. Talk to me about your teaching style and then also, what do you enjoy most about teaching.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

I like the Socratic method of teaching. I like to get feedback. I like the lecture aspect. I like getting involved with the students; getting down and dirty with them. I like talking about things other people are afraid to talk about in the classroom; race, religion and politics. Most people don't want to talk about it, but when you're thinking about criminal justice, it's one of the biggest businesses in the world. It's going to incorporate all three no matter how you look at it. Whether you're talking about criminal law, criminal procedure, police administration or in our Capstone classes, the most valuable part of that is listening. It's what we teach our students. It's okay to be... You've got to be able to communicate, but listening is the key.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

There are certain things that are going to be said and if you're not listening, you will miss. We teach critical thinking. I believe that critical thinking is a strong point of our course syllabi and also, the strength of the faculty that we have with the vast amount of knowledge, their experience, their willingness, their drive to take on more, like right now. We're doing more with less. I thank all of my faculty for that. As far as me, I'm high energy. I believe the class should be engaging. It should be exciting, but in between that, we should also be sharing knowledge.

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Dr. Phillip Neely:

If you're sharing knowledge and you're engaging, students will come. Like they say, "If you build it, they will come." Students will come. Some of our faculty have no problem filling classes. I have to stop them. Don't put anymore students in your class. A lot of our faculty is that way because they are very engaging. Others are monotone. We're working to get them there. Like I said, we are a work in progress, but overall we have great faculty. They all mimic me. They all mimic the wing man, here Dr. Joseph Cillo and together I think we're Batman and Robin. We're the cape crusaders of criminal justice, here at Saint Leo University.

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah, very well said. Love the energy. I know you have touched on it as well, but as far as the one on one support, the availability of our instructors not only at University campus, but at our education centers and online as well is a big selling point for us and it sounds like you really do connect to that one on one with your students.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Oh, yeah. If you think about it, all of my students have my cellphone number. I give them the hours they can contact me. They know when to call and what to talk about. Don't call for personal business. School related, things of that nature. If you go around the campus on a daily basis and look at all of the instructors during office hours, students all out in the hallway trying to get in to talk to the professors because they believe in the students. They help these students understand not only just the educational values, but the core values of the university as a community. Listening to their problems... A lot of these students have got problems that if the professors didn't care, the students probably wouldn't stay in school.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

They have to listen to these problems and help guide them through these problems and that's what our professors do, here at Saint Leo University, including myself. I'm always available. Students call me, parents call me and I make sure I respond to them immediately. Most people say within 24 hours. I try to say within immediately. If I miss the call, I get back within the hour. I email back within two hours. That's what we do. We want to be responsive to our students, to our parents, to this community, to make sure that we're doing everything possible, every. Everything possible to assure our students they have a positive learning environment and we care.

Greg Lindberg:

Very well said. All right, so Cillo on to you now. First off, talk to me about why-

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

Wait. I have to take a deep breath after that. I don't know what there is left to say. He has said it so perfectly.

Greg Lindberg:

Very succinct. Love the energy, everything. I'm curious, Cillo. Why do you prefer to be called Cillo rather than, say Dr. Cillo?

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Dr. Joseph Cillo:

It's a personal choice that goes back to my days in law school. When we were called on by our professors, they didn't say Mr. Cillo. If you were called on by a professor, he just yelled out, "Cillo," and from there, it took a life of its own. In the law firm, I was lucky enough to be mentored by one of the two true geniuses in my life. Ed Arnett used to say, "Where's Cillo? I've got to talk to Cillo." It's just followed me and it's comfortable. I believe it's a sign of respect from those that understand that I am Cillo and I look at it like this, Greg, with humor. Madonna was Madonna. Prince was Prince. I'm Cillo. In the classroom it's my show. I believe we bring energy to our classrooms and I say to Neely all the time and to you, the university environment should be an amusement park of learning and I think when they say Cillo, it adds to that familiar tone of what could be a very tedious experience called school.

Greg Lindberg:

I know, myself included when I was a student in college, sometimes you might be a little hesitant to approach your professor for whatever reason and I think it really does bring it to a different level when you have that type of communication. Now, I know you mentioned law school and then working as an attorney. Talk to me about your career prior to getting into teaching.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

You want the good days or the bad days?

Greg Lindberg:

Hey, both.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

You have both.

Greg Lindberg:

Oh, yeah.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

You don't get to be where Dr. Neely, myself and the other faculty members are without owning that you have some bad days. That's called experience and if you look at all your experiences, good and bad, it leads you down one road called wisdom and if you can share that with your students, they get the benefit of hearing about a mistake, perhaps before they make it. They know that there's life after the university. How did I get here? By airplane. I flew into Miami, went to the University of Miami for undergraduate. I did my graduate work at the University of Paris in France. From there, I went to Cal Western in San Diego for law school and after that, I practiced law at Arnett Hatton and years later the firm morphed into a much different animal and it was merged, if not purchased, by a much larger firm. Partners were bought out and we saw a different world.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

The door was open for us to leave. I agreed to do appellate work and to this day, I still write appellate briefs and I am available to the law firms across the country if they're looking for an appellate brief on heinous criminal defense. I'm not much interested in anything that doesn't spark heinous criminal events. I still do that. I was retired. I was in private industry for 10, 12, 14 years and I got a call, "Would

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you be interested in being an adjunct?" Well, at first I said, "Okay," but it wasn't Saint Leo. It was Hillsborough Community College. I taught there for two or three years and the phone rang again and it was Saint Leo University.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

They said, "Would you be interested in being an adjunct?" Yeah, I'm interested. We're practitioners. We have all of this knowledge and what are we going to do with it, if we just play golf and go home? I can still tell you that my brain is alive and I have a lot to share with my students. I welcome them in my office and in my classroom. They should hear everything. They should smell it, taste it and take their eTicket attraction and join me for the ride and that's what I try to do.

Greg Lindberg:

Very nice. I will say I did have a chance to sit in on one of your classes on serial killers, spree killers and mass murderers and I really could sense, like you said, the amusement park of learning and how these students really had to deal with such a challenging and difficult subject to most and were able to achieve that through the way that you handle that type of class.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

Well, I took something from my chair. Dr. Neely casually one day said to me before I was even teaching the serial killer class, he said, "Cillo, we've got to get these students comfortable with being uncomfortable." I have never forgotten those words. I tell my class, "At the end of each semester, I hope you've learned to be comfortable with being uncomfortable." Dr. Neely was in my class and I said, "The author of those words is standing in the back of our classroom, today." I will never forget the day he said that to me and I have taken it into my supreme court class, my serial killer class, my substantive criminal law class. The world around you is not always going to be comfortable. You've got to be able to think outside the box, critically thinking, not pausing with an, "Uh," or an, "Um," be better than the person that's speaking next to you and have the knowledge necessary to make your point. Yeah, that's what I do. I make them comfortable with being uncomfortable. It's my mission.

Greg Lindberg:

Now, I know Dr. Neely did touch on the graduate programs and the masters and the DCJ. I know you do teach some courses in those as well. Could you talk about those graduate programs and maybe what makes them different from others out there.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

What makes our graduate program different is a gentleman by the name of Dr. Robert Diemer. Without Dr. Diemer, I'm not sure our graduate program would have grown into the nationally known department that it is. Give all that credit to Dr. Diemer. What do I teach? I'm low on that food chain. I teach a really interesting class called constitutional issues. If there's anything Cillo is interested in, more than even serial killers, it would be the supreme court of the United States. SCOTUS, the most powerful branch of our government. He's given me a chance to teach constitutional issues at the graduate level and there's nothing better than to discuss with graduate students what it is that SCOTUS has determined to be constitutional and to apply it to criminal justices. All of a sudden the lights in your house go on and you understand, "Oh, my. That's exactly why the fourth amendment doesn't say 'unlawful.' It says it prohibits unreasonable search and seizure." The lights go on and you understand how we arrived there. To me, there is nothing better than discussing that.

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Greg Lindberg:

Very well said. I did want to bring up the strong relationship that Saint Leo has with the Pasco Sheriff's Office and perhaps both of you could touch on this. How would you describe that relationship and how has that benefited many of our students?

Dr. Phillip Neely:

It's been a great relationship and the students have benefited greatly from that relationship. One, we have the management, leadership education program with the Pasco Sheriffs Office led by Dr. Robert Diemer. That's a great program. Like now, the state attorney general of Florida is here at Saint Leo in our board rooms presenting on the opioid conference. They're talking about how to prevent opioid use and how to challenge that. That's a great thing, to have them on our campus, to have them here, partnered with Saint Leo University shows that we are tied into our community and they are tied into us. Another thing we run is our command officer management program with the Pasco County Sheriffs Office. One of the benefits to them, their employees go through our program. They don't have to lose a lot of time from work. They can either get their bachelors or masters degrees and that's a benefit to them.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

We bring it to their location. We teach at the Pasco County Jail. Dr. Cillo actually teachers classes there in their training room. Dr. Sullivan teaches classes there. I've taught classes there through the command officer management program. It's a great partnership that helps, not only the Pasco Sheriffs Office, but the students here at Saint Leo University and also the community itself. Another good benefit is our CPI program led by Dr. Joseph Cillo through Ken Killian, who's the director over there. We get students jobs. We put them in there through field placements and when they leave here, they leave the university with a career. I'm sorry. Not a job, a career. Say the right words, Phillip. They leave here with a career.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

You're thinking about a 22, 23 year old graduating with a college degree thinking about what I'm going to do, now that I've graduated. What you're going to do, you go see Cillo and through Cillo, you get put in field placement. Through field placement with the Pasco County Sheriffs Office, we have multiple areas we put them into; patrol, investigation, CPI, which is Child Protective Investigation and most of them leave the university with a career. Their parents can't ask for anymore. Their child, son or daughter, has come here, got a four year degree from an accredited university and going on into a career upon graduation. That's what the parents, that's what the Pasco County Sheriffs Office, that's what the community, that's what ever professor here at the university strives for.

Greg Lindberg:

Cillo, anything to add to that?

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

Not much, but let me add this. Our field placement program at Saint Leo University will stand up to any program in the nation. As of today, we have 67 agencies across the United States; federal, state and county, that our students can interview for three, six, nine or 12 credits per semester. If they are willing to take the time to do a field placement, imagine graduating with your bachelors in criminal justice, but your certificate of completion in field placement. If you're interviewing for a career anywhere after college and you're up against people who don't have the same credential you have, who are they going to hire; the person who has the degree or the person that has the degree and the completion of field

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placement? We firmly believe that field placement is an essential part of our educational institution. Let me end with this. This semester, the spring semester coming up, we have 46 students participating in field placement. That will go from January and then through the summer and that will grow in summer numbers after we return from winter break. How can you offer a better education to a group of young students than to actually be working in the field with the agencies that are training them?

Greg Lindberg:

Yeah, it really is unbeatable, that package, that type of resume. Just a few other things. Cillo, I did want to ask you about some book projects that you've been involved in recently, if you could talk about those a little bit.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

I can. I can tell you this. I've just completed a book called *The Killings of Sam*. It's about Sam Berkowitz, The Son of Sam. Can't do it without my chair. My chair has been the person that I can rely on to read the manuscripts of everything I write because sometimes you don't see the trees because of the forest. He reads everything, he sends back his comments. The book wouldn't be what it is today, if it was not for a team and I got to tell you, between him and one or two other professors in our department, the book has become sought after. It will be released in January. It will be available Amazon, it'll be available on Prime. It has been picked up by the Oxygen channel. From what I understand, it'll be aired March or April. I guess the most important part of this, the cover of the book itself says Saint Leo University and we can't do anymore for this university than to give them the credit for the opportunity to write this book.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

That's a great book, Dr. Cillo, but I want to talk about another book you've got out there that's getting national notoriety, even from other universities calling you on it. It's called *The Serial Killers*. Can you talk about that just a little bit, please sir?

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

If you'd like. The second book that not many people knew about until that moment, Dr. Neely is *Serial Killers: An American Obsession*. It has already been picked up by a publisher. It will be available as a sequel and it will come out in the fall of 2020. From what I understand, more than understand, I've been asked to make it a five book series and I can only say this to all of you. It's a topic that seems to captivate our students, our faculty and the rest of the country. I want to make it clear, Saint Leo University gave me that platform. That platform came, as you know Greg, right from an article you wrote on the alumni network, but they found your article online and they began to contact me and they actually bid for the right to publish the book.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

I can only say thank you to Saint Leo and really, thank you to you. You look across this desk, I can't do any of this without the guidance and the permission of my chair. Think of the synergy we have at Saint Leo University in the Department of Criminal Justice. Every one of us talks to the other about these projects. This is an honor, a privilege to be here. Let me end with this. You realize that Neely and Cillo and the rest of the department are training the future generations of this nation. We have a tremendous impact on what this nation will become and I believe we take it seriously.

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Greg Lindberg:

Very well said. I do want to wrap up here just on one last question. Let's say there is somebody out there listening to this considering Saint Leo University for either an undergrad or a grad degree in criminal justice, and I'd like both of you to answer this, what would you tell that individual? Why should they attend Saint Leo?

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

Why should they attend Saint Leo? Haven't we been talking about that for the last 30 or 40 minutes? I'll tell you this, if you're interested in Saint Leo, pick up the phone. By the time we're done talking, you won't even doubt your reason for coming to Saint Leo. Saint Leo truly is an amusement park of learning. It really is.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

If you're in the centers, I speak from the campus and centers and online. Saint Leo provides practitioners teaching classes. It's different when you've got an attorney teaching a class talking about things that they have already done or experienced. Police officers, commanders, FBI agents. We have FBI agents, DEA agents, police officers from all different ranks working in our organization. We have caring faculty. We have professionals in the classroom, practitioners who believe in what they do, who's energetic and sincere about helping you get to where you want to go. Come to Saint Leo. We're for you, and as always, go Lions.

Greg Lindberg:

All right, well Dr. Neely, Dr. Cillo, really appreciate the time and I hope everyone out there has found this conversation informative. I really thank both of you for joining us, here on the Saint Leo 360 Podcast.

Dr. Phillip Neely:

Thank you.

Dr. Joseph Cillo:

I just want to say get Lion ready and thank you for having me.

Speaker 1:

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