

00:04

Every parent's worst nightmare: July 20, 2012, my phone rings at 4:30 in the morning. It's my son Alex's girlfriend, Amanda, saying hysterically, "Tom, Tom, there's been a shooting, and they dragged me out of the theater. They wouldn't let me stay. I wanted to [stay], but they dragged me out." I say to Amanda, "Amanda, are you OK? Have you been hurt?" And she said no, that she was fine, that Alex had saved her life. I then say, "Amanda, where's Alex?" And she says, sobbing, "I don't know, we can't find him. They dragged me out of the theater. They made me leave. He was shot. I tried to wake him up, but I couldn't wake him up. He wouldn't get up. They dragged me away. I didn't want to leave him." And I say to Amanda, "The last time you saw Alex, was he bleeding? Did you have any of his blood on you?" And she cries, "Yeah, a lot," and breaks down.

01:36

Alex loved Amanda. And he was one of the most honorable men on earth, and at the age of 24, he had to make the decision to risk his life in order to ensure she would live. I knew in my heart if he couldn't get up, he was dead.

02:02

I had just arrived the night before with my wife Caren and my youngest son for a week's vacation in Hawaii. We were literally 3,300 miles away. Caren and I frantically started calling his cell phone, to no avail. We left multiple messages. We then turned to the media. But all we could find was information on the murderer and his booby-trapped apartment.

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We tried calling the Aurora police station, but it was impossible to get an answer. But in hindsight, it was understandable. They were dealing with 12 dead, 70 injured, the carnage so bad, the police had to bring some of the victims to the hospitals in the backs of their police cars, because they had run out of ambulances. It was a horrific and chaotic scene.

03:22

We would never see Alex again, his injuries so severe I had to shield even his mom from looking upon him, for fear that would be the lasting image of him in her mind.

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But you know who we would see again and again? The murderer. His pictures were everywhere. One article was six paragraphs long and featured his name 41 times. The media had made him famous. But my firstborn son, Alex, a hero, was absent from those initial reports.

04:16

Caren and I immediately realized that there was something wrong with the way the media responds to these random mass shootings since Columbine. We started doing research, and we realized that if we could change the way the media reports, we could reduce the amount of shootings and save lives.

04:46

(Applause)

04:55

Let me explain. Almost every single random mass shooter has something in common. Can anybody guess what that is? They want notoriety. They want to be famous. In fact, these murderers are telling us this themselves. The Sandy Hook murderer kept a spreadsheet of previous mass murderers and their number of kills. The Orlando Pulse nightclub murderer called a local news station -- during his attack! -- and then stopped to check Facebook to see if he'd gone viral. The Parkland murderer recorded and posted a video stating, "When you see me on the news, you'll know who I am." The Aurora theater murderer told his psychiatrist that he recognized he couldn't make an impact on the world in science, but he could become famous by blowing people up. And most telling, the Umpqua Community College murderer wrote on his blog about a previous mass murderer, saying, "I've noticed that people like him are all alone and unknown, but when they spill a little blood, the whole world knows who they are." A man who was known by no one is now known by everyone, his face splashed across every screen, his name on the lips of everyone on the planet, all in one day. It seems like the more people you kill, the more you're in the limelight. These are just a few examples. I could go on and on. These murderers are telling us they want to be famous like the murderers before them, and the media continues to give them exactly what they seek: notoriety.

07:39

The gun debate is very emotional, and our mental health issues are very complicated. Both will take time to correct. But to reduce the carnage, we don't need an act of Congress. What we need

is an act of conscience on the producers and consumers of mass media to remove the reward of notoriety.

08:10

(Applause)

08:19

So to save lives, Caren and I launched "No Notoriety," dedicated to challenging the media to protect our communities by adhering to these research-backed principles.

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One: report all the facts on the mindset, demographics and motivational profile of these shooters, but minimize their names and images, unless they're at large.

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Two: limit the use of the shooter's name to once per piece, never in the headlines and no pictures in prominent locations.

09:04

And three -- Three.

09:07

(Laughter)

09:08

I'm not good with numbers.

09:10

(Laughter)

09:12

Refuse to publish any self-serving material provided by the shooters.

09:20

(Applause)

09:28

To be clear: this is not an infringement on anyone's First Amendment rights. This is not censorship. We are merely asking the media to leverage guidelines they already have in place.

09:47

For example, the media does not report on journalists that have been kidnapped in order to protect them. The media does not report the names and images of victims of sexual assault or suicide. These responsible journalistic practices protect public safety with zero impact on the public's right to know.

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Academic studies show that the average news consumer wants to hear less about the shooters. Instead, the media should elevate the names and images of the victims, both murdered and injured, the heroes and the first responders. They should --

10:46

(Applause)

10:51

They should promote data and analysis from experts on the fields of mental health and public safety.

11:03

All the experts agree. The FBI, the International Police Association, the Major City Chiefs Association and A.L.E.R.T., the law enforcement organization dedicated to training first responders to stop active shooters, all endorse the principles of No Notoriety. In fact, in 2014, the FBI started the "Don't Name Them" campaign in support of the idea. The American Psychiatric Association supports reducing and minimizing the identification of these shooters. The idea has gone worldwide, with the Prime Minister of New Zealand calling for no notoriety after the Christchurch shootings.

12:01

But as much as we want the media to change, they are for-profit organizations. They won't change unless we hold them accountable.

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(Applause)

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The media makes their money from advertising based on the number of viewers and clicks. If we can reduce the number of viewers and clicks on any subject, the media will change the way they report on it.

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So the next time you see any media organization -- print, digital, radio or television -- gratuitously leveraging the names and images of these shooters, stop watching, stop listening, stop clicking, stop liking and stop sharing. Write to the producers, editors, station managers and CEOs of these news organizations. Take note of the advertisers who support those segments and write to their CEOs. Because together, we can push the media to act in the interest of public safety, not profits.

13:37

It's too late for Alex, and it's too late for my family. But please don't join our club by inaction, the club nobody wants to join. The due's too high. Because it's not too late for people who aren't victims yet. We have the power to reduce random mass shootings. Let's use it.

14:09

Thank you.

14:11

(Applause)