

The logo for EMS1, featuring the text "EMS1" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, followed by a white curved line resembling a stylized "1" or a swoosh.

**EMS1)**

# **REIGNITE EMS PASSION**

BY BANISHING BURNOUT

A guide to  
reducing stress  
by improving  
mental, physical,  
relationship and  
career health

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Barriers to health, wellness and happiness – among them long shifts, lack of sleep, the potential for on-the-job injury and post-traumatic stress – are all too common in EMS.

These stressors, which impact providers at work and in their personal relationships, paired with a murky career path and limited options for professional growth, make it difficult to navigate a long career in EMS without a plan to prevent one of the most significant growing issues within the industry: provider burnout.

In the most recent [EMS Trend Report](#), less than 1/4 of respondents reported they have “joy in work and no symptoms of burnout. The vast majority of respondents reported increased stress and reduced energy, and at least some symptoms of burnout.

In this eBook, sponsored by [ZOLL](#), find tips for banishing burnout and improving mental, relationship, physical and career health for providers, as well as strategies for EMS agencies to help providers stay on the job longer, and to retire happy and healthy. Share this eBook with your colleagues to improve EMS resiliency.

— Kerri Hatt,  
Editor-in-Chief, EMS1

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# **Reignite your passion for EMS:**

## Your guide to repairing burnout

Re-energizing strategies to overcome exhaustion, cynicism and a diminished sense of self-worth

By [Kerri Hatt](#)

EMS is rife with barriers to health, wellness and happiness – among them long shifts, lack of sleep, the potential for on-the-job injury and post-traumatic stress. And struggling providers don't suffer alone. Their stress can easily project onto colleagues, friends and family members at home.

Pair these stressors with a murky career path and limited options for professional growth, and it's difficult to navigate a long career in EMS without a plan to prevent one of the most significant growing issues within the industry: provider burnout.

### PREVALENCE OF BURNOUT IN EMS

Researchers from the AMA and Hennepin Healthcare in Minneapolis [surveyed 20,947 providers from 42 healthcare organizations across the U.S. in 2020](#) to assess their stress during the pandemic. They found 49% of respondents self-reported burnout, with 43% suffering from work overload and 38% experiencing anxiety or depression. Stress scores were highest in women, Black and Latinx healthcare workers.

Those who felt valued by their organizations – 46% of respondents – had a 40% lower chance of experiencing burnout than those who don't feel valued.

In the [2021 EMS Trend Report](#), less than 1/4 of respondents reported they have “joy in work and no symptoms of burnout. The vast majority of respondents reported increased stress and reduced energy, and at least some symptoms of burnout.

### REPLENISHING RESOURCES TO OVERCOME THE SYMPTOMS OF BURNOUT

While not classified as a medical condition, the World Health Organization does include burnout in the ICD-11 chapter on factors influencing health status as “a syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed.” WHO identified three distinct symptoms of burnout:

1. **Feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion**
2. **Increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job**
3. **Reduced professional efficacy**

Researchers Heng and Schabram expanded on these symptoms in their findings, published in the [Harvard Business Review](#) and [Academy of Management Journal](#). Heng and Schabram note burnout symptoms stem from a lack of resources, which can be remedied through replenishment:





- **Exhaustion** is a depletion of mental or physical resources, which can be mediated by “re-energizing acts of self-care,” (e.g., meditation, cooking a nice meal or taking a nap), they write.
- **Cynical detachment**, on the other hand, is a depletion of social connectedness, which Heng and Schabram recommend combatting by being kind to others (e.g., offering words of encouragement or taking a coworker to lunch).
- **A reduced sense of efficacy** – a depletion of value for oneself – can be approached through both self-compassion (e.g., completing a project or exercising) and compassion for others (e.g., comforting a coworker), they found.

Heng and Schabram note there is hope for those suffering symptoms of burnout, and compassion is like a muscle that can be exhausted, but strengthened through training – be it breath

training, appreciation exercises or yoga. Additionally, they found that organizational practices to reduce burnout are helpful, but individuals must feel empowered to take control of their own wellness to break free of burnout.

### EMS BURNOUT REPAIR KIT

To help agencies, leaders and providers mitigate the primary sources of burnout, EMS1 has created the [EMS Burnout Repair Kit](#), sponsored by [ZOLL](#), containing articles and a multi-part webinar series to provide strategies for individuals at all levels to help them emerge as better, happier and more complete. **EMS1**

### About the author

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Kerri Hatt is editor-in-chief, EMS1, responsible for defining original editorial content, tracking industry trends, managing expert contributors and leading execution of special coverage efforts.

# How to foster a mentally healthy environment

Learn how peer support programs, EAPs and chaplaincy can help your providers weather emotional storms and mental health crises



*In the first installment of the [EMS Burnout Repair Kit series](#), presented by EMS1 and sponsored by [ZOLL](#), Allina Health EMS' Nicole Holm, Richmond Ambulance Authority's Rebecca Szeles, and Harris County ESD 11 Mobile Healthcare's Xavier De La Rosa and Sean Simmonds offered perspective into how mental health support programs, from EAPs, to EMS chaplaincy, to peer support teams, can create psychologically healthy workplaces.*

► [Watch the on-demand video](#)

By [Kerri Hatt](#)

In a work environment punctuated by physically demanding long hours, interrupted sleep and stressful calls, agency efforts to protect providers' mental health are paramount to preventing burnout.

In an [EMS1 webinar](#), sponsored by [ZOLL](#), a panel of EMS leaders shared how their agency's mental health support programs, from [EAPs](#)

[that understand the needs of providers](#), to EMS chaplaincy and peer support teams, can create psychologically healthy workplaces.

The panel included:

- Nicole Holm, MA, BCC, chaplain with Allina Health EMS

- Xavier De La Rosa, BS, LP, NRP, FP-C, chief clinical officer for Harris County ESD 11 Mobile Healthcare
- Sean Simmonds, emergency preparedness and safety manager for the Montgomery County Hospital District
- Rebecca Szeles, a nationally registered paramedic and communications supervisor at the Richmond Ambulance Authority.

Following are takeaways from the live discussion on the correlation between mental and spiritual health and burnout.

## **1 Peer support can help minimize everyday stress, not just in a crisis**

Paramedic Rebecca Szeles shared her experience as a member of Richmond Ambulance Authority's Critical Incident Stress Management Team and [Peer Support Program](#).

Peer support providers can identify the warning signs that identify when a call that may have been missed by CISM is impacting a provider. "Not every call is going to affect everyone the same," Szeles noted, illustrating with a personal anecdote she uses in training.

Szeles' first call was a 12-year-old pediatric arrest, but it's not the call that stuck with her. The call that hit her hard was the triple A call she ran just weeks after losing her grandfather to the same ailment.

While it's no surprise that CISM and peer support programs are extremely capable of helping providers after a critical incident, Szeles explained that peer support can also help providers process the calls they encounter each day, as well as daily stressors. Peers can relate to stresses at home, from finances, to child or elder care challenges due to schedules.

"Someone who works every day with these providers, who can relate to what they're going through, and who can identify the signs when someone needs help are uniquely positioned to offer that help. If we catch the signs early, we can start them towards the healing process before it gets worse," Szeles noted.

Szeles offered these key tips for a successful EMS peer support program:

- To build a strong peer support team, you must have a culture of trust
- Only a peer can be a peer: don't put field supervisors in a position where they must report an employee

## 2 Chaplaincy is an often misunderstood, underutilized asset

In her portion of the discussion, Chaplain Nicole (Nikki) Holm, MA, BCC, encouraged the group to consider [chaplaincy](#) with a beginner's mindset. Holm broke down some of the common misconceptions people hold about chaplaincy:

- **MYTH: Chaplains offer religious support.** Holm noted, "What I really like to tell people is that my particular belief system, my particular background is really irrelevant. That I am here to show up for you in whatever ways are helpful and life giving for you. And so, the hope would be that an EMS chaplain isn't here to preach, isn't here to pray, isn't here to read

scripture or whatever you might think of when you think of a chaplain. It's really to help you in whatever ways are life giving for you ... we're here for all the people in all the ways."

- **MYTH: Chaplains intervene to keep the situation calm.** Holm shared a quote from [Chaplain Kate Braestrup's](#) book, "I'm here to be with you while you freak out or grieve or laugh or suffer or sing. It is a ministry of presence. It is showing up with a loving heart."

"That is really what the work of EMS chaplaincy is, Holm said. "So, it's an additional benefit in addition to EAP, in addition to peer support. It is people designated to be with their providers while they freak out or grieve or laugh or suffer or sing to show that presence of love."

- **MYTH: Chaplains are there for the difficult calls.** "We're here to provide support not only in the objectively or generally difficult calls, but also in the [subjectively, personally difficult calls](#)," Holm explained. "So, recognizing that what's triggering for one medic is not going to be triggering for the next, or vice versa."





That depending on our family histories, our backgrounds, what we have going on in our personal lives, calls that might not be difficult for anyone else, can be really difficult for one particular person.”

### **3 It's not enough to have an EAP, without a culture and plan that makes it effective**

Sean Simmonds acknowledged agencies may have an EAP that can provide counseling services, home life coaching and work-life balance support, “but, do we have a culture where it’s OK for people to speak up to say, ‘Hey, I went through this one call and it really hurt me. It didn’t hurt me physically but it hurt me. When I went home, I started having nightmares. I had a panic attack on the way to work. I really just did not want to wake up this morning,’” he asked. “And, once we’ve built a culture where it is OK to speak out, once employees do speak up, how are we acting on it?”

While a one-size-fits-all approach will not work, it’s important to have a confident plan, one you have prepared for with identified routes for providing support. “We need to be very confident in our actions so that the employees that we’re giving

services to are confident that what we’re going to help them,” Simmonds said.

A [mental health crisis](#) is a disaster, just like a hurricane, a massive freeze or a tornado, Simmonds stressed. “It can absolutely derail a person’s life ... destroy financial backgrounds, family life, work life. So, it absolutely is a disaster and should be prepared for just like we prepare for fires and hurricanes and everything else.”

### **4 Be prepared to help providers through a mental health crisis**

Even with all the right programs in place to support members’ mental health, agencies still must be prepared for a mental health crisis.

Chief Clinical Officer [Xavier De La Rosa](#) shared the unique partnership Harris County ESD 11 Mobile Healthcare has built with a local behavioral health hospital to support members.

The Honor Strong program at Cypress Creek Hospital is a resiliency focused, dedicated acute inpatient program created to address the unique symptoms experienced by law enforcement, firefighters, frontline healthcare workers,

emergency medical personnel, active duty military members and veterans. Named after the Houston Strong motto that arose in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, the Honor Strong program is designed to help first responders weather a mental health storm.

The program offers a direct, private and dedicated referral line, 24/7, as well as a mental health inpatient voluntary service for first responders and military personnel staffed by certified counselors who are first responders themselves.

The program offers tiered support, from a telehealth mental health assessment; to mobilizing the counselor to where the provider is; to a VIP admission to the hospital, where providers have a dedicated entrance, with their own unit and wing, to avoid being mingled with patients they may have transported themselves.

“The toll taken by these experiences on the men and women who serve in emergency roles can be overwhelming, as well as more intense and damaging than most of us can imagine,” De La Rosa noted. “And so, we’re really, really excited about the Honor Strong Program. We really look forward to growing this throughout the region and the country.”

## **MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS ARE REAL AND PRESENT IN YOUR AGENCY**

When you prepare for mental health needs and crisis, understand they’re happening now, Simmonds stressed. “There are people in your agencies who are going through mental health crisis, as we speak. They’re in my agency, they’re in yours – they’re everywhere,” he said. “It’s

important that we acknowledge that and prepare for whenever they decide to speak out. It’s OK if they don’t want too. It’s absolutely somebody’s will to get to that point and kudos to them when they do. But we need to prepare for that whenever they are.”

Simmonds advised the first step to prepare for mental health support needs to be to protect privacy first and foremost. If a member divulges information on their personal life, it needs to be understood that it’s not going to go further than it needs to. A threat to themselves or others will require expanding to incorporate the right level of support, but on a need-to-know basis only. **EMS1**

## **About the author**

Kerri Hatt is editor-in-chief, EMS1, responsible for defining original editorial content, tracking industry trends, managing expert contributors and leading execution of special coverage efforts.



**DOWNLOAD**  
the Richmond  
Ambulance Authority's  
Peer Support guidelines  
and ethics contract



# RELIEVING RELATIONSHIP STRESS

Feel better by converting your  
key relationships from stress-  
producers to stress-reducers



*In the second installment of the [EMS Burnout Repair Kit series](#), presented by EMS1 and sponsored by [ZOLL](#), Mike Taigman, MA; and Sascha Liebowitz, BA, JD, tackle re-entry tips for connecting with family after a difficult shift, the neuroscience of stress management, and strategies for making relationships work during challenging times.*

► [Watch the on-demand video](#)

By Sascha Liebowitz, JD; and [Mike Taigman](#)

Masking, not masking; the CDC's new guidelines; schools are closed again or not; there's an ice storm coming this weekend; our favorite restaurant went out of business.

Do we really have to quarantine?

When are we going to get back to normal?

What is normal anyhow?

Stress in our world is at an all-time high and it's [having an impact on our relationships](#). We are all suffering increased stress at home and at work, and our need to manage this stress in healthy, helpful ways is apparent.

[Alcohol and drug dependency rates](#) are up. [Divorce rates](#) are up. [Spouse and partner abuse rates](#) are up. And, aside from these big, obvious markers of stress, if you just ask around, many people are just feeling generally less good than

they used to more of the time. We're taking it out on ourselves and each other in all kinds of not-so-healthy ways.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

Converting our key relationships from *stress-producers to stress-reducers* can help us feel better more of the time. Science and experience show that when the people around us feel better, it has a positive ripple effect – and vice versa. We have the ability to give and receive this positive ripple effect by managing our own wellbeing.

Our first wedding vow was, "I promise to take care of myself so that I can take better care of you, our relationship, our family and our community." Particularly in the helping professions, there is a bias towards taking care of other people before oneself. [Taking care of ourselves](#) is something we do for each other because we want to bring our fullest selves to our relationships.

How are you doing taking care of yourself? How are you? Too often, people answer this question with, "fine." Which often stands for Foul, Insecure, Needy and Emotional – I'm FINE! How's your [sleep](#), [exercise and nutrition](#)? Do you take regular time to deeply relax and reset?

Many times in relationships, we get caught up in trying to be "good" for the other person at the expense of meeting our own needs. Other times, we might fall into the trap of begrudging our partner for doing what they need to do for their own wellbeing – especially if it's something that seems to interfere with our own plans and desires or is inconvenient to us in some way.

When we [recognize and take care of our own need for fulfilling work, play, connection with friends and activities apart from our partner/spouse](#), we can bring that energy home. The same principle applies at work – people who are taking care of their mind, body, and spirit are more effective workers and teammates.

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION TIPS

Our second wedding vow was, "I promise to stay in the conversation with you as long as it takes for both of us to feel complete." When we wrote this vow, we considered it the divorce-proofing not-



so-fine print. We figured that as long as we were talking through a disagreement, we would still be working through it together.

When both people have agreed to keep going until – if not agreement – at least a feeling of completeness with the argument on both sides, it brings a different energy to the dynamic. Here are some of the secrets to making this vow work:

### **1 Rest breaks are legal**

Some conversations take a lot more time and energy than can be addressed in one sitting. Calling time-out when temperatures run high enough to risk saying something regrettable is also legal.

### **2 The person who cares the most wins**

For example, Sascha cares more about what temperature the house is than Mike does. Mike cares more about the kind of masks we wear than Sascha does.

When disagreements crop up, it helps to remember that our partner, coworker, spouse or boss is an important person in our life even though their preferences and desires sometimes conflict with ours. When it matters less to us than to them, let their choice win and groove on the increased harmony. When our preference gets

implemented, appreciate the other person for their willingness to be flexible.

### **3 Make requests**

Sometimes, the most pro-relationship thing you can do is be willing to be the squeaky wheel. If something's bugging you, it's your job to let the other person know and keep letting them know in a way they can hear it – usually expressing an unfulfilled need or desire with a request.

“Would you be willing to ... ?” is better than a critique or rant: “Why don't you ever ... ?” It's important to set our partners up for success by making requests that are actionable rather than venting generalized dissatisfactions and expecting them to be mind-readers.

### **4 Accept do-overs**

We all say stuff we could have said better. One of the most useful tools in any relationship is the do-over. A pre-established agreement to allow asking for and receiving do-overs can help when everyone's inner resources are low and someone has just stepped in it.

“I'm so sorry – can I please have a do-over?” is the way we activate this tool. No explanations, no justifications – just apologize and commit to try to do better in the future.

## 5 Prospective forgiveness

This powerful relationship tool recognizes that at some point, we are all going to mess up and say something unintentionally hurtful or do something that disappoints, frustrates or displeases those we care about. Deciding ahead of time to forgive each other for minor or major transgressions is a game-changer.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said, “Forgiveness is nothing less than the way we heal the world. We heal the world by healing each and every one of our hearts. The process is simple, but not easy.”

During these crazy stressful times in our world, healthy relationships can be life-saving for anyone. Especially those whose lives are dedicated to helping others. **EMS1**

## About the authors

Mike Taigman is the improvement guide for FirstWatch. He teaches Improvement Science in the Master’s in Healthcare Administration and Interprofessional Leadership at the University of California San Francisco and the Emergency Health Services Management Graduate Program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

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Together, they co-authored [“Super-Charge Your Stress Management in the Age of Covid-19.”](#)



**DOWNLOAD**  
a 5 step guide to  
relationship  
communication  
conflict resolution

# Make the investment in your people

Tips from  
Boston EMS for  
starting a health  
and wellness  
program to  
support member  
resiliency



*In the third installment of the [EMS Burnout Repair Kit series](#), presented by EMS1 and sponsored by [ZOLL](#), Boston EMS members shared how their Health and Wellness program supports members' emotional and physical*

*► [Watch the on-demand video](#)*

By [Kerri Hatt](#)

In 2019, the Boston EMS Peer Support Unit, realizing members' needs were growing

exponentially during the pandemic, tossed the playbook they had used for years, and called an audible in how they delivered services to their membership, according to Lt. Patrick Calter, BEMS PSU coordinator. Boston EMS implemented [a Health and Wellness Program](#), initially focusing on psychological first aid and suicide prevention, and then expanding to address resiliency and sustainability for members after any time on the job. "Our new goals were to provide the tools for a successful and healthy career with the department."

Calter explains the Program's efforts – incorporating training in toxic stress reduction, trauma informed care, fitness classes, stretching and yoga – are the "fourth leg of the stool" in peer support. Supporting the members requires recognition, intervention and postvention, and then caring for the folks who have done the work and preparing them to go back into the workforce and be the most resilient responders they can be, Calter explained. He defines success as teaching members how to be resilient responders who "get out healthy and live for as long as possible, retired and happy."

Leaders from the Boston EMS Health and Wellness Program shared what they've learned as



Photos courtesy Felicia Hickey, Boston EMS

Reignite EMS Passion by Banishing Burnout



they've grown in an [EMS1 webinar](#), sponsored by [ZOLL](#).

The panel included:

- **Lieutenant Patrick Calter**, state EMS instructor/coordinator, coordinator of the Boston EMS Peer Support Program, suicide prevention instructor, addiction recovery coach and ICISF certified trainer
- **Felicia Hickey, NRP**, lead field training officer assigned to the Boston EMS academy, certified Crossfit Level I trainer, and ICISF certified in group and individual peer support
- **Nicholas Mutter, BS, NRP**, Boston EMS union secretary, ICISF certified in group and individual peer support, certified recovery coach, certified in psychological first aid and with veteran-related suicide prevention
- **Chrissy Snyder, NREMT**, certified yoga and meditation instructor, ICISF certified in group and individual peer support

Following are tips Boston EMS offered for creating a successful health and wellness program.

## 1 Get buy-in

Lieutenant Calter noted the biggest question he gets about the health and wellness program is,

unsurprisingly, “how do you build it?” followed by, “how do you fund it?”

First and foremost, you need buy-in from the decision makers, Calter explained. “We at Boston EMS are very fortunate that this was an easy sell,” he noted. Boston EMS has a long-standing (since 1989) peer support program. When approaching decision makers about adding fitness and wellness initiatives, the chief was the first person to sign on.

As for funding, money was obviously tight, Calter said. Amidst the pandemic impact on resources, “money was going out the door, without a whole lot coming in.” But leadership recognized this was an investment the department needed to make and was willing to make. The initial request: at least one full-time person assigned to health and wellness to get the program off the ground, was asked and answered with a yes.

That was a great message to send to the membership, Calter noted, of “we see there is a need here, and you matter.”

The department was also fortunate to receive a donation from a group of attorneys after an associated press interview about the program. Though they couldn't accept the funds as a municipal agency, the donation inspired the

Boston EMS Foundation, a nonprofit organization that can accept donations earmarked for members' health and wellness and peer support needs. That original generous donation was the start of funding that is now allowing the department to build a gym and academy home for the program. "I wouldn't say it's easy, but the pillar of it is buy-in," Calter said.

## **2 Customize training to individual fitness levels**

As with any group, Boston EMS members' abilities and strengths vary. As a CrossFit instructor, Hickey is able to adapt members' workouts to meet their fitness levels.

Hickey ranks members from an initial fitness test and separates groups into different levels. One room will offer cardio, and another more weight and strength training, she explained, whatever that group needs the most to succeed.

It's also important to create a holistic, supportive environment where people feel safe, Snyder said, noting they avoid pressure and competition that can push people away.

"Any sort of movement is better than no movement at all," she noted. "If you're going to start somewhere, start a program off fresh by trying to start events that involve movement, involve socializing."

## **3 Combine stretching and strengthening to prevent injuries**

One class Boston EMS offers is barre. While sometimes stereotypically thought of as a class for dancers or females, Boston EMS incorporates barre classes to help members strengthen their hips, thighs and back, Snyder explained.

Without a balance, overstretching or lifting will lead to injury. Combining the two creates healthy, supple muscle groups that are less likely to be injured by strenuous activity, like lifting and carrying, Snyder reported. Teaching a range of motion through different exercises decreases injuries out in the field.

Hickey explained how the instructors start with the proper mechanics of each movement and

demonstrate functionality. "So if we're going to do wall ball squats, I relate to them how the squat carries over into your daily routine, picking up the stretcher or picking up patient, or just the green bag or anything that we do. If we do step ups, it's just like stepping into a truck ... whatever it is that it relates to in the daily life," she said.

"We push them as much as they can, so they can do the job properly without getting hurt," Snyder said. "Because that's the most important part ... so once you get to the street, you don't hurt yourself, your partner or your patient."

## **4 Incorporate yoga and holistic approaches to improve performance**

According to Snyder, the team has noticed that members who continue to join the fitness classes have tackled issues with substance abuse and depression, in addition to looking and feeling better. They've also noticed an increase in performance level, something she attributes, in part, to incorporating stretching and yoga into fitness programs.

"When you're able to clear your head and move your body in a way to increase endorphins and cannabinoids in your body to make you just feel better overall, you end up performing better also in the field," she said. "So, you leave your job feeling better, and then you also perform better as well. You make better decisions. You make less mistakes than you do when you're stressed."

Snyder believes if every single first responder department focused on holistic, physical and mental wellness, it would result in a huge increase in overall health and resiliency, helping members to keep their relationships healthier and to be stronger and able to stay on the job longer.

## **5 Foster camaraderie to create a psychologically healthy workplace**

In addition to fitness classes, including barre and yoga, the group also organizes activities like races and even jewelry making. These classes have resulted in a growing camaraderie. Hickey noted the classes help form bonds between new and tenured providers. "Everyone finds someone they can relate to," she noted.

And those bonds are not limited to members. Boston EMS has opened up classes to members' family members as well. Pandemic stress wasn't just impacting members, Hickey noted. It was also impacting their families, and this provided a way for providers to spend time with their loved ones, even when working overtime.

Spouses, significant others, even children who can follow along can come to the classes and meet the people their provider works with, and the rest of the members can meet the people their peers go home to. "It builds a family," Hickey said.

Snyder noted the fitness classes often begin a few minutes late as member chat about what they've experienced at work as people arrive. What could, in the wrong environment, turn into a toxic conversation about coworkers, in these cases gives people the space to talk about a difficult call and decompress with others who understand.

## TREAT YOUR PEOPLE RIGHT

When asked, "what is your challenge to EMS leaders?" Calter was clear: "Make the investment."

He noted it's not realistic to believe there's not a need for health and wellness initiatives, and that members are doing OK after the last 2 years. "It's not the case," he said. "Folks are struggling. Mental health is the silent killer of our profession and to take it out of the darkness – the stigmatization of it – you need to put it in the

forefront of how you lead and how you grow and how you train."

"Your folks are going to fight how they train, and it's important for them to know that from Day 1, when they're being onboarded, that this is not something that we hide behind," Calter stressed. "We don't hide mental health, we don't hide struggles, although it's confidential, you know we're going to treat this and we're going to treat it right, and we're going to treat you right."

Make it your legacy to improve the wellness of your people, Calter advised. "Make the investment in your folks, you know, it's probably the best thing you will do." **EMS1**

## About the author

Kerri Hatt is editor-in-chief, EMS1, responsible for defining original editorial content, tracking industry trends, managing expert contributors and leading execution of special coverage efforts.



**DOWNLOAD**  
the guide: 5 tips  
to improving  
your health and  
wellness program





# DIFFERENT JOB — **SAME CAREER**

5 ways to expand your options and forge your  
EMS career



*In the fourth installment of the [EMS Burnout Repair Kit series](#), presented by EMS1 and sponsored by [ZOLL](#), a panel comprised of individuals representing different career paths in EMS and leaders from progressive agencies discussed resources for career advancement and resiliency, how to find the path that is right for you, and how agencies can support providers in advancing their careers.*

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By [Michael Fraley, BS, BA, NRP](#)

It is no secret that the healthcare industry is in a staffing crunch. Many are leaving the nursing, EMS and other allied health professions and I hope this article catches you before you make the same jump.

I was writing a quick bio to submit for speaking at a recent conference when it dawned on me how many different EMS-related roles I have held over the last 30 years. They say variety is the spice of life. Is my “well-seasoned” career the reason I am still in EMS?

Not so many years ago, working shifts on the ambulance was about the only EMS job there was. Things have changed, and much like nursing, there are now more and more opportunities

outside of the rig to make a living in our chosen field. The key, though, is to prepare yourself for those roles before you get to the point of dreading every shift and spending time between calls combing the job postings for a new gig.

Here are a few of the steps I took over the years to expand my horizons and make myself more eligible for other roles.

## 1 Education

One of the first things I started doing while working my first paramedic job was to [keep seeking education](#). Just look around. There is more of it out there than you think and much of it is free.

And I don't just mean your required refresher courses; stretch your wings and soak up material outside of your scope of practice. Sure, maybe you won't ever administer that drug, do that procedure or interpret that CT scan, but knowing a little more about how other fields within medicine work is never a bad thing.

Look for non-clinical topics, too. The list of choices is endless. Don't overlook opportunities to learn communication and technical skills, including the use of new software, social media platforms and web applications.

## 2 Networking

While we may be in the era of social networking, it still takes some deliberate effort to [meet new people and get connected](#). You never know which of your next introductions will lead you to an opportunity you never imagined.

Next time you see me, ask how I got to know [Lexipol Editorial Director Greg Frieze](#) and how that connection has shaped my career.

## 3 Conferences

Attending EMS conferences may be [a combination of education and networking](#), but they can also be much more. My favorite benefit is the boost of excitement for our industry I



get each time I go – excitement not only for the cool new stuff I see in the expo hall, or the information shared in the educational session, but for the brilliant and motivated minds we have in EMS. There really are some great people in the business and a bright future ahead if we can all continue to work together.

While I enjoy heading to the big national conferences, don't miss out on the many excellent state, regional and even local conferences that are held all around the country throughout the year.

#### **4 Get involved**

Make an effort to get involved in the business around you. Yes, that may mean going to a few meetings and sitting on a committee or two, but doing so is a great way to meet people, learn about the industry and contribute to changes.

Start small by being active on work groups within your department or company, but also seek out groups like local government oversight committees, regional trauma councils, state EMS

committees and boards, labor organizations, etc. They may not all be your cup of tea, but you don't have to be on them forever and the experience gained – and introductions made – will be worth it.

#### **5 Read the news**

I don't recommend watching the 24-hour news channels all day, but I do promote keeping abreast of international, national, local and industry news. Skim the politics off the top and get a sense of what is really going on at each level to have a better idea of what jobs may be hot in the next few years and what skills you may need to have to compete for them.

#### **6 Work-life balance**

While [finding a good work-life balance](#) may be seen more as a way to preserve your mental health and affinity for the career, it is also important for preparing you for other jobs in the business. It may even help you discover a skill you did not know that you had or a way to combine a hobby with something in EMS to develop a new

product or service. Sometimes, the best ideas come to you when you are least expecting them.

I hope these ideas help you prepare for the next step in your EMS journey. It is truly a rewarding and honorable career choice, and we need each and every one of you to continue to meet the healthcare needs of our populations.

Stay safe out there. **EMS1**

### About the author

Michael Fraley has over 25 years of experience in EMS, including flight paramedic, EMS coordinator, service director and educator. Fraley began his career in EMS while earning a bachelor's degree at Texas A&M University.

He also earned a BA in business administration from Lakeland College. When not working as a paramedic or the coordinator of a regional trauma advisory council, Michael serves as a public safety diver and SCUBA instructor in northern Wisconsin.



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