

**Live Long and Prosper!  
Tips For a Long Career in EMS**



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Sciences*



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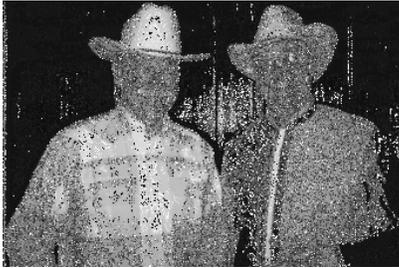
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***This presentation is dedicated to the memory of  
James O. Page  
whose long, varied and successful career serves as an  
example of what an EMS career can be***



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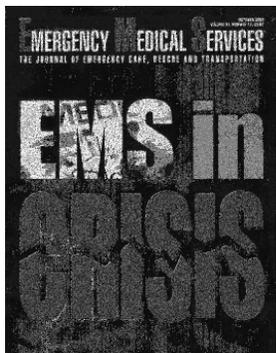
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- System Integration
- **Recruitment & Retention**
- Data
- Leadership
- Legislation & Funding
- Worker Safety
- Quality of Care

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**The Good News...  
It's Not Just Us!**



- NY Times series: "The Stress Explosion"
  - 62% of workers say their workload has increased over last 6 months
  - 53% say their work leaves them overtired and overwhelmed

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**Today's Working Environment**

- Young American with 2 yrs college is expected to change jobs at least 11 times before retirement!
- "Non working" hours aren't
- PDA's, Bluetooth, and computer links from home to work
- 62% of workers do NOT use all their vacation time

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**Health effect of  
Success and Failure**

- Major expansion
  - 9% increase in hospital admissions
  - 7% increase in long absences (90 days or more)
- Major downsizing
  - 100% increase in heart disease rates

*Some people thrive on stress!*

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### Why do people leave EMS?

- Burnout components (Maslach and Jackson, 1981)
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Tendency to depersonalize patients
  - Tendency to evaluate ourselves negatively
- Typical EMS provider lasts only 3-5 years




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### Some folks are prone to burnout

*Lifestyle types prone to burnout: (Work-Stress Burnout in Emergency Medical Technicians and the Use of Early Recollections" Kosinski, F; Journal of Employment Counseling; 12/1/2000*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Controllers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Wish to control life</li> <li>– Dislike surprises</li> <li>– Hide their feelings</li> <li>– Strive for perfection</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Pleasers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Need to be liked</li> <li>– Feel required to please everyone all the time</li> <li>– Sensitive to criticism</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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### Some folks are prone to burnout!

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Martyrs/victims</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– "Disaster chasers"</li> <li>– feelings of nobility, self-pity</li> <li>– seek sympathy of others</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Feeling Avoiders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Believe that reason can solve all problems</li> <li>– Fear their own spontaneity</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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***Some folks shouldn't be here  
in the first place!***

- "Aginners"
  - Oppose everything
  - Know only what they are against
  - Pessimists



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***Lifestyles resistant to  
burnout:***

- Getters
  - Exploit and manipulate life and others to their advantage
  - Can be intimidating or charming
- Drivers
  - Active, aggressive, forceful
  - Always want to be on top, first

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***Lifestyles resistant to  
burnout:***

- Excitement seekers
  - Despise routine, repetitive activities
  - Love the excitement of a challenging call
  - Hate the paperwork



***But are these the  
people you want?***

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**Unrealistic Expectations:**

- You will spend most of your time saving lives
- Most of your patients will be better when you drop them at the hospital than they were when you arrived on the scene
- Every call will be exciting
- CPR always works
- AED's always work
- Patients are always grateful



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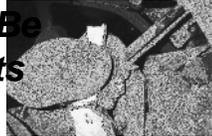
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**What We SHOULD Be Telling Our Students**



- Sometimes being sick makes people smell bad
- Urine and feces smell really bad (especially other people's!)
- Some people never bathe
- Being sick or hurt can make you scared
- Scared people often act out with anger
- Some people will be angry with you simply because you're there
- Training is time consuming and constant, and does not always occur at convenient times

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**True or False: Paid providers experience more stress than volunteers**



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**FALSE!**

*"A Comparison of Rural and Urban Emergency Medical System Personnel: A Texas Study", C Chng, PhD; J Collins, PhD; S Eaddy, PhD, EMT; University of North Texas, August, 2001*

"Volunteers have just as much stress, if not more, than career providers"

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**Stresses on Volunteers**



- Juggling job and volunteer responsibilities
- Increasing demands on time from work
- Work longer daily hours
- Family pressures
- Increasing training demands
- Less training than career counterparts
- There are fewer of us
  - 16-18% fewer in "Baby Bust" generation than in "Baby Boom" generation

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**Higher Pressure on ALS Providers**

- Fewer of them
- Even more training demands
- Reliance by lesser trained EMT's & First Responders



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**It's not the job,  
it's the paperwork**



- Administrative issues noted as **most significant factor** in reported stress (4 studies between 1984 and 1997)
  - Poor administrative support
  - "Guilty until proven innocent"
  - Unfair assessment and promotion policies
  - Need to "play the game" to advance
  - Poor attitudes of hospital personnel
  - Low pay
  - Too much paperwork
  - Inadequate equipment
  - Limited career options
  - Inconsistent application of the rules

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**Why Do Some People Stay?  
Advice From the Experts**

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|----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Baxter Larmon  | Beth Adams      | Bruce Nepon  |
| Bruce Roemmelt | Bill Flynn      | James Korn   |
| Jim Allen      | Jim Kelly       | Jim Paturas  |
| Jim Slattery   | Kate Hansen     | Kathy Weaver |
| Laura Walker   | Marianne Bitner | Mike Smith   |
| Mike Taigman   | Patty Maher     | Steve Bold   |
| Steve Elliott  | Tom Frazier     | Tom Schwartz |
|                | Denny Hare      |              |

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**Let go of the myths**

"Remember that 98% of the people you are called to help will live despite your best efforts. The vast majority of your patients are not in immediate life or death circumstances and will not die while under your care unless you do something really stupid!"




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**You Are Not God**



"Rule 1: People Die. Rule 2: As long as there is a greater power above, paramedics and EMT's cannot stop or judge Rule 1".

"In this business, a draw is a win"

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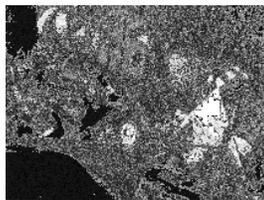
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**Make It About People**



"Do this job because of the people you will help. Don't to it for the glamour, or hero status or money. In the end it is the people you will remember"

"What the majority of your patients will remember about you is not that you saved their life (you really won't do that very often in your career), but whether you were professional and compassionate. Above all, they mostly will remember if you were nice"

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**Listen and Learn**



"Take the time to truly listen to your patients; not just during history and physical, but the added bonuses they choose to share with you"

"Never start out as a jerk with people, then try to be a nice guy. They will only remember that you were a jerk. Start out as a nice guy. The anger and frustration that is directed at you usually melts away. If it doesn't, you always have the option to then be a jerk."

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***Be a Patient Advocate***

“You are not God, but you have the ability to provide one last bit of dignity to this person and their family”

“At a bare minimum, I offer a sympathetic ear to hopefully make the patient’s day a little brighter”

“Advocate for your patients as you would your most beloved family member”.

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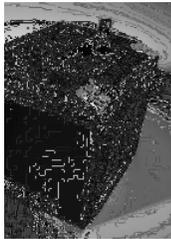
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***Be Positive  
(even when it’s easier to  
be negative)***



“To maintain longevity, stability and sanity, we always have to see the opportunity in what it is we are doing”

“People who are compulsively in search of discontent always find it”

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***Respect your peers***

“There are no para-Gods; you are only as good as your worst EMT”

“Paramedics save lives; EMT’s save paramedics”

“..... and vice versa!”

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### **Set Goals For Yourself**



“Begin with the end in mind. Covey calls this the habit of personal leadership; leading yourself toward what you consider your aims.”

“A ‘multi-year’ game plan is a must so that you do not get into a rut”

“Take the time and the opportunity to learn more, and get your education. Some day you will find yourself too old or hurt to do this. Always have a backup.”

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### **Recognize that there will be bad times and bad calls**

“People do not call 9-1-1 to say ‘have a nice day’. We meet people for the first time during what is often the most awful time in their lives”

“They are not mad at me... they are often mad at the situation”



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“You often will see people at their absolute worst moments; some of those same people who are intoxicated or drugged out when you see them will restore their lives and become productive, contributing members of your community. Some will not, and that’s not your fault. Try your best to have a ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ attitude”

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**Set The Example**

“Frequent flyers need one thing – someone who gives a damn! Treat them like dirt, and expect that for yourself or your family one day. Treat them with respect and you can expect that when you or your loved one makes a 911 call, the responding crew will treat them with respect and dignity”



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**Be Good At What You Do**

“Being good at what you do leads to satisfaction with a job well done; not being good leads to dissatisfaction, and possibly to regrets over a devastating mistake”

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**You Can Always Learn Something**

“When you go to a conference, it’s not all about the classes.. Networking and getting away from your provincial ideas of things is a great educational tool”

“I realize that my paramedic text was only 300 or so pages and the current edition is around 1,500, so maybe the new guy can teach me something from the current day.”



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**You Can Always Learn Something**

"Stories from 'back in the day' can be useful. As the new medic, I always resented the war stories delivered by my much more senior partners. Looking back on it now, I wish I had listened more"

"Commit to reading at least one EMS journal cover to cover each month. Even if the article is something you feel you already know. Much is gained from others who may have something to offer you hadn't thought of before"

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**Share your skills and knowledge**



"If I lack knowledge, skill or ability with my patient, he/she may not know it, and if I'm lucky no one else will discover my ineptitude. But if I'm not on top of my game in front of 30 peers, my credibility is shot"

"I teach, I study and research, and I am inspired to teach more"

"Make training meaningful. Nothing turns off a provider more than wasting their time with lousy training."

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**Be a Mentor**

"Prepare your subordinates for two jobs – theirs and yours"

"Don't be afraid to tell others about your ideas, but be realistic enough to know that many won't listen"

"Be the person people go to for help, not the one people run away from"

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**Be Willing to Lead**

“The challenge for those of us who leave the “street” is to continually strive for value in what we do and what we can offer. Once you get into the office, you need to look for other ways to give and get value. For me, it is in development of meaningful programs/projects and the impact that will have on the “system”.

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**And Willing to Follow**

“Remember, you will NEVER work or volunteer for a perfect organization, and it wouldn't be perfect even if you were in charge”



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**Managers ;  
Take Care of Your People**

“The number one job of an EMS administrator is to create an atmosphere that encourages the providers to do the best job they can every time”

“Above all else, be fair”

“Remember that, to some people, the word ‘Chief’ equates with the word ‘Idiot’. Nothing you do will ever change their minds”

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**More for Managers**



"Stay connected with the people on the street. This is much harder than you think"

"If you arrange for someone to get help, follow up to make sure it happened. Don't assume that because you made a referral that the help actually occurred".

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**Advice From a Burned Out Paramedic**



"When I started running with the squad, I thought I could never get tired of (or not love) doing EMS. Unfortunately, Critical Incident Debriefing came along a little too late. The ghosts still visit at night, although not nearly as frequently as they used to... guess they figured out they don't bother me like they used to"

"I found out I was not bulletproof (I know that's a shock...it was to me). I woke up and realized, every time the pager went off, I felt like I could literally puke. I realized I dreaded for my duty tour to come around and I HATED that which I used to love and had devoted so much of my being to!!"

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**Advice From a Burned Out Paramedic**

"Never forget your family and God – there's nothing out there more important (and they'll help you make it through this crazy life we call Emergency Services)

"Get Help from the Critical Incident Debriefing System"



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### ***You Need a Hobby***

"Life passes by quickly... don't miss it!"  
 "Take time for you"  
 "Don't become the job – remain well-rounded; it is too easy to define yourself by the job and those in it. You need a life outside of EMS"  
 "Have a part-time job or hobby that has nothing to do with EMS"  
 "When I'm away from work I give 110% to relaxing, regenerating and resting, and I don't think of work or what's happening there"

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### ***Family***



"Be open with your spouse/partner and talk about your job and/or day"  
 "Turn the cell phone off..... they'll call back if it's important"  
 "During the summer, nothing but a regular work schedule.... No Red Cross, no teaching EMT's, no Ski Patrol, no overtime – I managed to survive and have a successful marriage of 37 years"

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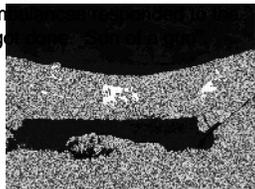
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### ***It's Not a One-Person Show***

"Turn the pager OFF! There are other people who will run the calls tonight"  
 "I thought I was indispensable to my department. Then I had open heart surgery and was out for six weeks. The phones got answered, the ambulance calls, and the paperwork all got done"




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**Learn**



“Quit volunteering for every CPR or First Aid class that comes along”

“I do find that it is important from time to time to take some time out from taking training courses to catch my breath. After a little break, I feel rejuvenated and find something new to learn”

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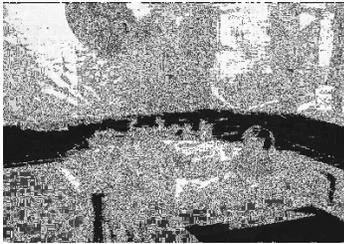
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“Work hard, play hard”



“Have fun”



“Laugh”

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**CONCLUSION**

- EMS providers, educators and administrators need to be pro-active in developing strategies to address and mitigate the causes of provider “burn-out” and “rust-out”
- Maintenance of a positive attitude and recognition of the rewards of providing good EMS are keys to provider longevity
- A well-rounded and healthy lifestyle are important in promoting a long career in EMS
- Seasoned and experienced EMS providers can be effective role models and mentors to help those who follow them enjoy long and productive careers in EMS

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