



Chris Cebollero

Position Sought: Treasurer

Candidate Q&A

1. How would you describe your leadership style, and how has it influenced your work in EMS?

I'd describe my leadership style as people-centered, accountable, and grounded in self-awareness. Leadership starts with the person looking back at you in the mirror. Before you can lead others well, you have to be honest about your own decisions, behaviors, and blind spots. That's been my principle throughout my career in EMS: hold yourself accountable first, set clear expectations, listen to the people doing the work, and never ask someone to meet a standard you won't meet yourself.

Three decades in EMS taught me leadership can't be one-size-fits-all. I've worked operational, clinical, educational, and executive roles, and each one reinforced the same lesson: adapt your approach, but stay consistent in your values. In a crisis, people need a leader who makes decisions and gives direction. In periods of growth, they need someone who listens, develops others, and makes room for them to contribute. Knowing when to lead from the front, when to work alongside your team, and when to step back is the job.

That's shaped how I approach EMS leadership day to day, focused on people and performance together. EMS organizations face real clinical, operational, and financial demands, but none of it holds up without the people delivering the service. I've worked to build cultures where accountability is expected, communication is direct, professional growth is taken seriously, and people understand how their work connects to the mission.

Above all, EMS has taught me leadership is never finished. A title gives you authority, not credibility. You earn that through your actions and your willingness to keep learning. That's the approach I'd bring to NAEMT: listen carefully, serve responsibly, make thoughtful decisions, and leave this profession and the people in it stronger than I found it.

2. In what ways do you advocate for EMS? What strategies would you recommend for NAEMT to strengthen its advocacy efforts and gain recognition for EMS as an essential service?

Advocating for EMS starts with telling our story clearly, consistently, and to the right audiences. Throughout my career, I've made that case as a clinician, educator, executive, author, speaker, and NAEMT board member. Whether I'm talking to elected officials, healthcare leaders, community partners, EMS professionals, or the public, the message is the same: EMS isn't just transportation. We're an essential part of the healthcare and public safety system, providing emergency care, access to healthcare, disaster response, community paramedicine, and an increasingly important link between patients and the broader healthcare system.

One of our biggest challenges is that EMS understands its own value better than the people who fund, regulate, and legislate it do. NAEMT can help close that gap.

First, we need to keep pushing, aggressively, for federal and state recognition of EMS as an essential service. Whether a community has access to quality emergency care shouldn't come down to geography or local budgets. It should be a basic expectation.

Second, our advocacy needs to lean more on data. We must show the economic and healthcare value EMS delivers, avoided ED visits, better patient outcomes, disaster readiness, rural healthcare access, and the growing role of mobile integrated healthcare and community paramedicine. A good story gets attention. Good data changes policy.

Third, we need stronger grassroots advocacy. NAEMT's membership, professionals across the entire country, is a huge resource. We should make it easier for members to understand the legislative issues, talk to their elected officials, build relationships before a bill ever gets introduced, and become real advocates in their own communities.

Finally, EMS needs one voice. Fragmentation weakens us. NAEMT should keep building coalitions with other national EMS organizations, fire service partners, healthcare systems, educators, and patient advocates wherever our interests line up.

EMS professionals answer the call every day. Our job in advocacy is making sure policymakers understand what happens if that call ever goes unanswered. Essential service recognition isn't just about the future of our profession. It's about protecting the communities that depend on us.

3. How can NAEMT better support and develop the EMS workforce, considering generational differences? How would you convey the value of membership to both current and prospective members?

EMS now includes multiple generations working side by side, each bringing different experiences, expectations, and ways of communicating. I don't think the answer is asking one generation to become more like another. The opportunity for NAEMT is to connect the generations while delivering value that meets members where they are in their careers.

For newer EMS professionals, development must go beyond clinical education. They need mentorship, leadership development, career pathways, networking, and a clearer picture of what's possible in an EMS career. NAEMT can help them see EMS not as the job they have today, but as a profession they can build a career in.

Experienced professionals, meanwhile, are an enormous source of knowledge. We should create more ways for them to mentor emerging professionals, contribute to education, serve on committees, and pass on decades of institutional knowledge. The goal isn't one generation replacing another. It's each generation making the next one stronger.

People also engage differently today. Some members value conferences and face-to-face networking; others connect through virtual education, digital communities, or online professional development. NAEMT should keep offering multiple ways for members to learn, participate, and lead.

When it comes to communicating membership value, every member is asking one question, whether they say it out loud or not: "What does belonging to NAEMT mean for me?"

The answer must go beyond a list of benefits. Membership means a voice in national EMS advocacy, access to respected education, professional development, networking, leadership opportunities, and connection to a national community working to advance the profession. And that value should be communicated differently depending on where someone is in their career. What matters to an EMT just starting out is different from what matters to a paramedic, educator, supervisor, or executive.

The strongest membership organization isn't one where people just say, "I belong to NAEMT." It's one where they say, "NAEMT helps me get better at what I do, gives me a voice in my profession, and helps build the future of EMS."

4. What is a pressing issue currently facing EMS, and how could NAEMT help address it?

One of the most pressing issues facing EMS is the financial sustainability of our delivery model. Agencies across the country are being asked to provide increasingly complex healthcare services while managing rising labor costs, equipment expenses, workforce shortages, and reimbursement models that don't reflect the true cost of running an emergency medical response system.

The traditional model, paying EMS mainly for transporting a patient, doesn't recognize what communities depend on us for. EMS must maintain readiness 24/7, regardless of call volume. We respond to emergencies, manage complex patients, support disaster response, provide healthcare access in underserved communities, and increasingly deliver care outside the traditional ED. But our funding structure is still built around transportation rather than the value of the care and readiness we provide.

NAEMT can change that conversation.

First, we need to keep advocating for reimbursement models that recognize EMS as healthcare providers and pay agencies for treatment, assessment, alternative destinations, and appropriate care delivered without transport. We should also keep supporting policies that strengthen the financial viability of rural, volunteer, municipal, fire-based, hospital-based, private, and nonprofit systems, because no single delivery model represents all of EMS.

Second, NAEMT can help develop and promote the data that shows what EMS costs and delivers. Policymakers need to understand not just what an ambulance transport costs, but what it costs to maintain a clinically capable response system that's available every minute of every day.

Finally, we need to help EMS leaders become stronger business and financial leaders. Clinical excellence will always be at the center of this profession, but today's leaders also must understand budgets, reimbursement, workforce economics, operational efficiency, and long-term financial planning.

The future of EMS depends on building systems that are both clinically excellent and financially sustainable. NAEMT has the national voice, the membership, and the relationships to help lead that effort. If we want EMS recognized as essential, we also must make sure communities have a sustainable way to fund and maintain it.