

Preparing for Leadership in EMS



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In my work and travels as NAEMT President, I have often been asked how I prepared myself for a leadership role in EMS. To respond, I have looked back over my 40 years in EMS and noted some key experiences and observations that I'd like to pass along:

- **Opportunity** – there are usually many, but they are frequently not recognized and seized upon. In too many instances, tremendous opportunities are passed up... either because they are not connected to immediate rewards, or they appear too difficult. Unlike the EMS environment that we work in – fast paced and of short duration – many leadership opportunities take time to see results. Earlier in my career, I was offered the opportunity to ride in a helicopter to pick up a non-emergent patient and transport them to the hospital. Not to miss that opportunity, I accepted – and by day's end, I was asked by the owner if I wanted to be the Director of Operations. I could have said no, since I knew nothing about helicopters. But, I accepted, studied hard and succeeded in a system which transported over 350 patients without a serious incident taking place. So, I encourage you to seize opportunities, wherever they arise. Go for it, even if you are afraid that you'll fail. We learn more from failure than success.

- **Initiative** – Many leadership opportunities can be self-generated. You don't need to wait for someone in your agency to announce a promotion opportunity. You can initiate a leadership role... either in your regular mission, or as a result of a project that needs to be done. And, you do not always have to lead to demonstrate leadership. Being a good team player demonstrates your understanding of leadership. So, step up and let your superiors and peers know that you are interested in doing more.

- **Integrity** – We all know people in EMS who, when they give their word, it is a solid commitment. These are people who “mean what they say” and “say what they mean.” These are the individuals who are willing to stand up and do what is right even in the face of peer pressure. I encourage you to

observe these people, understand how they make decisions, and strive to behave like them. Integrity is a common trait among all great leaders in EMS.

- **Communication** – Good EMS leaders communicate concisely, clearly, directly and respectfully. Good leaders have learned how to communicate with people who don't necessarily share their goals. They recognize that just because a person has a different point of view, they still have a right to be communicated to with dignity and worth. They also understand that respect and dignity should be afforded to both parties in a communication - there is no place for harassment in communications. There are too many instances in our business where communication sounds like something from a reality TV show... where people are not conversing but rather talking “over” one another. True leaders know the difference between “productive” versus “destructive” communication.

Opportunity, Initiative, Integrity and Communication

I am proud to tell you that these leadership traits are in abundance throughout our association. Great leadership is evident in every aspect of NAEMT, including the thousands of members who are working in their communities to make things happen.

A great example of NAEMT leadership can be found in our State Advocacy Coordinators and the leadership of our affiliated state EMS associations who have been so instrumental in making progress on the Field EMS Bill. As a result of their leadership, the Field EMS Bill was introduced in the Senate last month as S. 2400, and we are up to 34 co-sponsors in the House!

Great leaders can be found in NAEMT's education programs – PHTLS, AMLS, EPC, EMS Safety, TCCC, LEFR, and PEPL. The individuals who make up our NAEMT faculty – instructors, course coordinators, affiliate faculty, our state, regional and national coordinators, and the members of our education program committees – lead by example in providing the highest quality education to our EMS students.

So, you might be wondering if there are leadership opportunities for you at NAEMT. Well, you've taken a great first step by being a member of this national association. Here are some additional steps you may want to consider...

medical responders in the field address a number of challenges so they can continue providing the best possible care to patients. Improving response times, promoting better coordination among providers, and preparing technicians for disasters will hopefully help save even more lives.”

“EMS providers play an integral role in our nation’s health care system,” said Sen. Crapo. “This legislation recognizes the prudent need to ensure life-saving EMS professionals have the adequate resources to maintain their capability to effectively respond to medical emergencies.”

What’s in the Field EMS Bill?

- A new EMS EQUIP (quality improvement) grant program for EMS agencies that demonstrate need, regardless of delivery model, to assist with hiring, training and equipping EMS practitioners.
- A grant program for state EMS offices to strengthen and support system coordination and preparedness.
- Designation of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as the primary federal agency for EMS to better integrate EMS within the larger health system, and consolidate federal EMS and trauma programs into one office within HHS.
- Support for physician-led guidelines for medical oversight and direction, evaluation of medical liability and reimbursement issues affecting medical direction, and enhancement of data collection and integration of patient medical information.
- Testing and evaluation of innovative models for access and delivery of field EMS, including alternative dispositions of patients not requiring transport to a hospital.
- Research in field EMS to further improve quality, outcomes and promote the adoption of cost-effective treatments in the field.

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- Are you a member of an affiliated EMS association? Most of these associations need volunteer leaders and would welcome your interest in volunteering to help.
- Are you an instructor for one of our education programs? We have worked hard to make it easier and more affordable to become an NAEMT instructor through our new, online NAEMT Instructor Course. Yes, I know it costs a little money (\$42.95), but consider investing in your future – you are worth it!
- Are you interested in advocacy? A great way to get started is through your state advocacy coordinator. Our SAC’s are eager to help you get started and would welcome your assistance.
- Have you attended an NAEMT Annual Meeting held in conjunction with EMS World Expo? You should drop in and see what is happening. Meet members of the NAEMT Board and committees; see what areas you may want to work in and then, get to it.

Make no mistakes about it. This is hard work. Being a leader in our profession takes time and dedication to the mission. At NAEMT we are always looking for leaders – people who feel as passionate about improving EMS as we do. There are plenty of naysayers out there but the positive leaders – the ones who can see above the smoke – know where EMS is headed and want to be a part.

One more question I am often asked is how I manage to have the energy to do what I do. The short answer to that question is that I get my energy from YOU! I have met so many tremendous first responders, EMTs, and Paramedics around this country, and I am in awe of your energy and commitment to your patients and your community. You keep me going!

The long answer involves regular exercise, a regiment of living and eating healthy and making sure I have balance in my life. I know that is hard, especially in our work, but it can be done. Thousands are doing it every day and taking care of their patients, and themselves, exquisitely.

On behalf of all of us at NAEMT, thanks for all you do, every day, for EMS and our patients.